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Between the Lines

Why was the Mother of Methodism in South Africa written out of her story? What caused this working-class fenwoman, who became an architect of Methodist education there, to be effaced? In the light of her unearthed letters and poetry, and from the evidence of her female colleagues, students, and children, this history is now hers and ours.

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When I first searched for my great-great-great-grandmother, Ann Shaw, I had expected it to be the work of a moment. I anticipated reading her famous husband's journals and finding her strewn throughout: Ann Shaw – 1820 settler – female missionary to the AmaXhosa. But she was barely there. I read three memoirs about her husband; one by him, one by a male colleague, and another by a South African woman in ministry.[1] Only the latter, Celia Sadler, lamented Ann's absence:

> It is regretted that further particulars concerning the domestic life of Shaw and his family cannot be found. The

1. William Shaw, *The Story of My Misson in South-Eastern Africa* (London: Hamilton, 1872); William Boyce (ed.), *Memoir of the Rev. William Shaw* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1874); and Celia Sadler (ed.), *Never a Young Man: Extracts from the Letters and Journals of the Rev. William Shaw* (Cape Town: HAUM, 1967), Ann's portrait, p. 65.

> Methodist Archives in London and Grahamstown reveal only the story of his work . . . even the recording of the death of his wife, Ann, and the account of the funeral service, had to be found in the *Grahamstown Journal*.[2]

Instead, Sadler gave me Ann's portrait. It was a monotone print of an oil painting and my first impression. Ann's smile looked weary. The starched bow of her bonnet skimmed a surprisingly low neckline. Two ends of a shawl draped her figure, covering curves of breasts, a clinch of waist, and once-fashionable puffed sleeves. But there was one patch of clarity: Ann's eyes, nose, brow, and hairline. I was reminded of the 1850 sketch of Charlotte Brontë, both women with a central parting and smooth dark hair.[3] But Ann had a less pronounced brow and straighter nose (my nose). Her intelligent eyes looked directly at the artist and at me. Why was Ann erased? I was tired of male histories absorbing all the light and drinking all the ink.

Ann was a remnant; sole child of Matthew Maw, but fourth of the remarried widow, Anne Garthside, née Lancaster.[4] Three months before Ann's birth, her mother pressed a lifeless two-year-old (her second Ann) against her swelling breasts.[5] This trauma was Ann's first taste of death, raising levels of foetal cortisol. Ann had to fight to live. She was born in 1788 during an episode of smallpox while Britain was at war with Napoleon. When Ann was five, her balloted father was recorded 'Absent' in the *Stamford Mercury* and commanded to join up or be locked up.[6] And Ann's birthplace was where I least expected it – in the watery world of the Fens, in a 'hot bed of vice'. Matthew Maw's death record stated he was buried in Sutton St Mary's (now Long Sutton, South Holland) and was the publican at Sutton

2. Sadler, *Never a Young Man*, p. 13.
3. George Richmond, chalk, 1950, NPG 1452, National Portrait Gallery, London. Charlotte and Ann died within a year of each other.
4. Anne Garthside married Matthew Maw on 25 June 1787. Ann was born on 26 March 1788.
5. Anne's children with William Garthside were sole survivor, Mary (1782); Sarah-Ann (1784); and another Ann (1785).
6. *Stamford Mercury*, 'List of the Deserted and Not Joined Belonging to the Royal South Lincolnshire Militia', 8 February 1793, p. 2, col. 4.

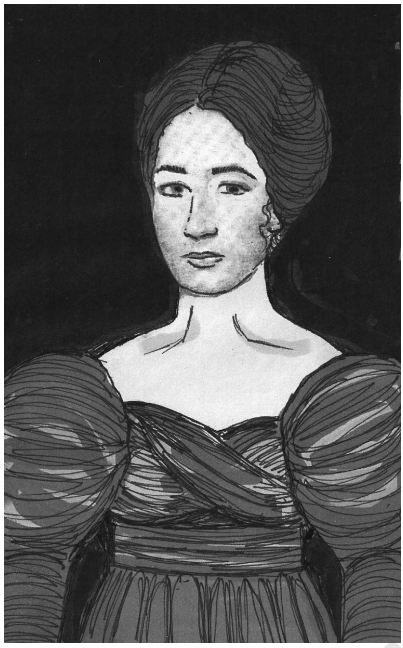
Wash Way.[7] *The Stamford Mercury* further revealed the business 'in the occupation of Matthew Maw' was 'that old-established and well-accustomed public-house called The Crown, situate at Cross Keys Wash'.[8]

It was at The Crown, Ann and her half-sister, Mary, likely helped their mother stir the stew – mutton or eel, bubbling in a cauldron, chained over open flames. In his memoir in 1797, local curate, Rev. Jerram, described the scene Ann called home:

> The doors of the public houses being open through the day, and often indeed through the night . . . in these hot-beds of vice were drunkenness and riot . . . There was not a single magistrate resident within 13 miles of Long Sutton, so that the publicans had no fear of their licenses being withdrawn for keeping disorderly houses . . . I found them filled with men, some quite intoxicated, others far advanced to that degrading state, and all noisy, some quarrelling.[9]

Maybe Ann's father sprinkled his beer with opium to match popular taste. Tied on tight, babies drooled poppy-head tea down mothers' backs as they weeded fields, spudded thistles, and turned flax. Adults ate opium to ease agues from the malaria that was rampant in the reeds.[10] The government permitted it to keep its wealthiest region from fenlanders' restless natures, as newly shrunk peat was pulled from their feet by drainage investors and enclosed from hungry spears, nets, and decoys that had fed them since they were blue-faced Iceni. Unlike Ann's mother, Matthew Maw was born 67 miles north in Redbourne.[11] Though he was embraced as cup-bearer, he was not one

7. Administration of Matthew Maw (Kew: National Archives, 26 December 1804).
8. *Stamford Mercury*, 15 September 1809.
9. F.W. and B.A. Robinson, *Long Sutton and District* (Spalding: Long Sutton and Civic District Trust, 1981), p. 157.
10. Virginia Berridge, 'Opium in the Fens in Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* (July 1979), pp. 293–313.
11. Ann's paternal grandparents were Richard Maw and Elizabeth Walkden (1719–99). Richard was the younger brother of Matthew Maw of Bigby (1706–93).



Author's own drawing

of them. Even in 2016, South Holland voted overwhelmingly against outsiders, with 73.6 per cent in favour of leaving the European Union, the highest in Britain.[12] But Ann was rooted in the wind-blasted Fens, in a county that has bred nearly every rebel branch of Protestantism since the Reformation.

I stared back at Ann's portrait and commenced her unmasking. I scanned her face, set up my Paint app, and erased smile lines and the bags beneath her eyes. I removed bonnet and collar, cleaned her scorched chin, to reveal a young beauty.

12. Winston Brown, 'South Holland and Boston Most Eurosceptic Areas in UK', *Boston Standard*, 24 June 2016.