

Broadlands House and Mrs. Harvey's Home for Ladies and Training School for Servants (Domestic)



On the road out of Newport to the east, stands Broadlands House on the east of Staplers Road. Today a modern extension stands to the east of the original building which was, in the nineteenth century, the lace factory of Henry William Nunn. The history of the lace factory is written elsewhere, so we'll look at the later use of the building.

I became interested in Broadlands House when I came across a number of servants, spinster and widows buried in the local cemeteries with 'Broadlands House', or a variation, given as their address at the time of their death. In total I've identified 3 servants, and 66 'gentlewomen' (typically, ladies 'living on their own means,' retired Companions/Governesses), buried.

Mary Nunn, daughter of Henry William, married Thomas Harvey at St. Paul's Church, Barton in 1856. After Henry William Nunn died in 1876, a local newspaper recorded that his bequests to Thomas and Mary Harvey were:

'The testator bequeaths to Mrs. Mary Nunn Harvey, the wife of his nephew, Captain Thomas Harvey, £2,000 and all his household furniture and effects, plate, picture, horses, and carriages; to the said Captain Harvey, £2,000.... He devises the manor or lordship of Briddlesford, Isle of Wight, and all the rest of his real estate, and gives the residue of his personal property upon trust to the said Mary Nunn Harvey.'

A condition of the trust was that Mary Nunn Harvey would come into the property when she reached the age of 45, i.e. in 1880, which then made her a very wealthy woman. The bequest included the Broadlands House lace factory which had long closed.

The Broadlands Home Charity

Under a deed of 1880¹, Mrs. Mary Nunn Harvey established the 'Broadlands Home Charity' with the transfer of the Broadlands property and £30,000 (circa £4.6M 2023) of securities.

The aim of the charity was specified as to provide a home and place of abode for unmarried poor ladies each to be 'at the time of her admission not younger than 50 and not older than 63 years'; and also 'a home and place of abode and instruction for girls intended for domestic servants'. No 'poor ladies' with an annual income of less than £50 (circa £7,700 2023) would be admitted or 'suffered to remain'.

¹ IW County Records Office

A later publication² records:

“The Broadlands Home Charity was founded and endowed by Mrs. Mary Nunn Harvey in 1880 for the following purposes, namely: to provide a home training (as servants) and outfit for a number of poor girls for two years, and to provide residence and board for forty ladies of limited means, on payment by them of sums varying from £20 to £26 per annum”.

One reference in a book suggests that Broadlands House was a ‘reformatory’; I don’t think that would fit with the home also housing a number of ‘Poor Ladies.’³

I couldn’t find any records of the home apart from the census records of the inhabitants; one striking point from all of the census records is the nearly complete absence of people born on the island. Using the census records, the inhabitants fell into 3 groups, the Superintendent and ‘staff’ of the home, the Poor Ladies, and the Servants in training. The 1891 census shows 87 inhabitants, made up of 39 ‘Poor Ladies’, 38 girls in training for Domestic Service, with the remaining inhabitants staff of the home. It is possible that other people associated with the Home actually lived-out in the neighbouring area so wouldn’t appear on these census returns; but this seems unlikely.

The staff of the home

The staff of the home included, as well as the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent, a butler (the only male in the household), a couple of Housemaids, a laundress, a matron of needlework, a kitchen matron, and a couple of general Matrons. Across the census, very few were born on the Island; London, Hampshire, Staffordshire and Hertfordshire were the birth place of some.

The ‘Poor Ladies’

The ‘Poor Ladies’ were, from the census, aged from 44 to 83 (despite the deed) and comprised those identified as living on their own means, retired Companions, retired Governesses etc. These would probably be ladies with insufficient income to set up their own household but wanting to live in the style to which they were accustomed. The birth places for these ladies were very widespread, including India, Ireland, Gibraltar and Belgium as well as nearly every county in England except the Isle of Wight.

There were some obvious relatives living under the same roof, some on the same census return, other at different times; examples being Julia and Edwarda Clapp, buried together in St. Paul’s Cemetery, and three Lavender sisters buried in Newport Cemetery. From the number of those buried in the cemeteries, it’s obvious that not all the residents ended their lives here; it’s hard to be confident in tracing some through the census but some possibly took up positions within new households; whether any were ‘turned out’ when their income dropped below £50 per year is unanswerable.

The ‘Ladies of the Broadlands Home’ were often mentioned in the local press reports of events in the St. Paul’s area. The press reported a few of the deaths but only a minority.

- 1883 saw one of the first deaths of a resident; Miss Charlotte McNeile, aged just 56, died while walking with another resident over Mount Joy when she took fright after encountering a bull. Miss McNeile was buried in the old St Paul’s Cemetery, to the north of the church.⁴

² ‘A History of the County of Hampshire: Volume 5, Parish of Newport’ published 1912

³ “Newport Isle of Wight Remembered” by Bill Shepard - “Following the demise of the local lace industry, Broadlands became a Reformatory, and is now occupied by government offices”.

⁴ Isle of Wight Observer - 20 October 1883

- 1926 saw the death of Mary Clare Cecilia Gilliland, a 100 year old widow resident of the Home who had spent much of her married life in India where her husband had been in the Civil Service – she’s buried in St. Paul’s Cemetery.⁵
- Another death in 1926 was Augusta Matilda Culling, the report in the County Press recorded that she ‘was for some years the collector at St. Paul’s of subscriptions for the Church Missionary Society’ – she’s buried in St. Paul’s Cemetery.⁶

Girls in training for Domestic Service

The Girls in training were recorded as aged between 14 and 20 with birth places all over the county; only a very few from the island.

I found it difficult to trace the individuals back to a previous census with much confidence; but those I did seemed to have come from reasonably respectable, though ordinary, working families; it is possibly that the families paid for the girls to attend the Domestic Service training.

Three of the girls appear to have been buried in the local cemeteries; 1904 saw the death of Alice Gertrude Barton (no relation) aged 14, one of the trainee Domestic Servants at the Home. She had stood on a fender in front of a fire to look at something on the mantle, and her clothing had caught alight. The inquest returned a verdict of "Accidental death" and she was buried in St. Paul’s Cemetery.⁷ The others were Daisy Nye in 1896 and Francis Hunt in 1914 with no record.

The home, 1930/40’s

The Home continued until the beginning of WW2. The 1939 Register shows that the number of inhabitants had dropped to 14 ‘poor ladies’, 8 young servants and 4 staff. The reduced numbers probably reflect the reduced numbers of people in service following WW1; without the ‘cheap labour’ of the Domestic Servants under training, the home may not have been financially viable and the end probably seemed inevitable. One burial in 1944, Harriett Fanny Rust, a retired Governess, records the address as Broadlands House and the place of death as Victor House Nursing Home, Ryde; possibly an indication that the last ‘poor ladies’ in residence when the home closed, were moved out to other homes.

An auction was held by Francis Pittis in June 1942 of ‘318 lots of useful HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE removed from Broadlands House’⁸; this seems to reflect that the home had closed by that time.

The charity, post Broadlands House.

I haven’t managed to establish events after the home closed, but in 2023 there is ‘The Broadlands Fund’ (charity 201433) (Broadlands Home Trust (Working name)) which seems to be carrying on the efforts of Mrs. Harvey’s home.

The stated objects of this charity are:

1. *Pensions to help widows or single ladies over 40, who are in financial difficulties;*
2. *For assistance to such poor girls as the trustees shall select, who are preparing for, entering upon or engaged in any trade, occupation or profession. Preference may be given to poor girls who are preparing for, entering upon, or engaged in domestic service.*

⁵ Hampshire Advertiser and Independent - 5 June 1926

⁶ IWCP - 3 April 1926

⁷ Portsmouth Evening News - Thursday 14 January 1904 - <https://www.foncc.org.uk/burials/grave-search/burial/10178>

⁸ May/June 1942 issues of IW County Press

Broadlands House, post the charity.

The War Department requisitioned the property during WW2 and built a number of huts in the ground. I've not managed to find any real details of what the property was used for except for a brief mention in a book that Ray Edmunds, who sung with the Stardust Company / ENSA during WW2, recalled a lot of ATS personnel in the audience when he performed at Broadlands.

A report of a Newport Town Council meeting records the War Department proposed to release the property in 1945 and expressed the intention of the Council to take on the house to provide 'temporary accommodation for persons inadequately housed.'⁹

The Borough of Newport proposed the compulsory purchase of the Broadlands House and grounds in 1946, the published schedule describes the estate as 5 acres with a 600 feet frontage to Staplers Road and back to St. Paul's View Road (except for three existing properties,) area outlined in red on map below.¹⁰



September 1946 saw a report of the 'First Island Squatters' when a Newport family consisting a couple and their three children moved into two Army huts in the ground of Broadlands. One hut, previously the sergeant's mess, had been converted into 'a comfortable living room, with the bar as the kitchen,' and the other hut into three bed-rooms.¹¹

The 1950 Electoral Register¹² includes a number of voters registered in Broadlands House 'Huts'.

Loose ends.

I feel there are a number of unanswered questions, (which someone else may like to investigate):

- How did the 'old ladies' end up at Broadlands House; the home must have been known about across a wide area of the UK?
- The same applies about how the Trainee Domestic Servants were recruited.

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<https://www.foncc.org.uk>

⁹ IWCP 28 July 1945 P.7

¹⁰ IWCP 20 July 1946

¹¹ IWCP 14 September 1946 P.5

¹² IW County Record Office