

Margaret Ethel Barwick

A resume by Isabel Hutchison, great granddaughter

As far as I know Margaret Ethel was just a wife and mother, who had built an interesting piece of architecture, Romney bay House. She had no association with Kent at all, the house came about because of Clough Williams Ellis, the architect, who was trying to make Romney Bay work as a resort at that time, much as he did with Portmeirion. She must have met him somehow, and then become involved in the idea and liked it, and she had the finance to build it and create a family holiday home.



Romney Bay House c1950

Margaret Ethel Barwick was born in 1873 in Sunderland. She had no career that I'm aware of, and through her father's success as a northern industrialist she would become an independently wealthy woman. Her father was; John Storey Barwick: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Storey_Barwick Her mother also came from a ship building dynasty called Short Brothers, and that combined with the problem of women having no rights in that period in history meant that there wasn't much need for her to obtain money. There's a bit more about her father and family here: <https://landedfamilies.blogspot.com/2020/08/427-barwick-of-thimbleby-hall-baronets.html>

Margaret went by her middle name and was known as Ethel, Bray being her married name. She lived in Sunderland until 1895, when she was married aged 22 to an army officer called Reginald Edward Traherne Bray who had fought and survived the Afghan war at Maiwand 1878-80, he received a medal for services. By the time they met he had been widowed with two young sons, then he was posted to Sunderland. He was considerably older than herself, so I believe she must have thought she would have an exciting life that would perhaps include world travel. Not to be unfortunately, just the

roll of an army wife. Reginald Bray came from a seriously military minded family (I doubt he showed any emotion at all - especially after Afghanistan), his four brothers were all in the army, as was his father and uncle and the generation before that too, his nephew would later become supreme commander of NATO

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Bray_\(British_Army_officer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Bray_(British_Army_officer))

Ethel Bray's first daughter was born in Farnham, so they were posted to Surrey at first. My grandmother (the second child) was born in King William's town in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, five years after the marriage and in 1900, perhaps this was because of the second Boer War (1899 - 1902), so they did get to go somewhere, but it wasn't for long as she was back home in Yorkshire at her parents home the following year. The Bray family then appear to take up residence in Harrogate according to the census. She had three children with Reginald, and most of her life would be spent parenting them, which would mean becoming a 'single-mother' when they were relatively young, as her husband abandoned her for another woman. I'm not altogether certain if that was before or after the first world war, but he wouldn't allow her to get a divorce.



Margaret Bray with her three children c1910

Both her stepsons were both killed in WWI, which her husband also fought in, but was retired early, owing to illness. I think this must have upset him greatly. Today we would probably say that he suffered from mental health problems owing to shell shock and grief! But I think the marriage may have broken up earlier than that, as we did find photos of his lady with him before war began.

Ethel's son John Bray would make it to Cambridge University where he studied medicine, he didn't go into the army, so his father would have nothing to do with him. In his career he is credited with isolating the e.coli bacteria that had been the cause of infantile death due to Gastro-enteritis, thus saving hundred's of young lives. The fact that he became successful might probably have been because he had a level headed mother, who was a keen supporter of her family, despite being on her own. I believe she was quite formidable and capable of enduring hardship, perhaps it came from her northern genes. Also, from what I understand, her son had been bullied somewhat as people believed that Ethel was a suffragette, evidently she wasn't, she was just fiercely independent, but this gives you an insight into how society was in those heated times, toward single minded women in her position. My own grandmother was very fond of her indeed and very sad when she died in 1950 at the age of 76.

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