

= The Sleeping Girl of Turville =

Ellen Sadler (May 15 , 1859 ? after 1901) , sometimes called The Sleeping Girl of Turville , was a resident of Turville , a small village in Buckinghamshire in the United Kingdom . In 1871 , aged eleven , she purportedly fell asleep and did not wake for nine years . The case attracted international attention from newspapers , medical professionals and the public .

Born to a large , impoverished family of farm workers , Ellen was sent to work as a nursemaid at the age of eleven . Soon afterwards , she began suffering periods of drowsiness and was referred to a local hospital . After four months her condition was declared incurable , and she was sent home . Two days later , Ellen had a series of seizures and ? her mother claimed ? fell into a deep sleep from which she could not be roused .

Ellen became a tourist attraction for the village , and her family made considerable money from visitors ' donations . As the years progressed with no sign of Ellen 's waking , speculation grew that her illness was either a hoax or caused by her mother , an issue that was never resolved . In late 1880 , soon after her mother 's death , Ellen awoke . She later married and had at least five children .

= = Background = =

Ellen Sadler was born on May 15 , 1859 to Ann and William Sadler , who lived in the small village of Turville , Buckinghamshire . The Sadlers were a large , impoverished family consisting mainly of farmhands ; Ellen , the youngest child , shared her home with her eleven siblings . Ellen 's father died while she was an infant ; Ann Sadler subsequently married Thomas Frewen .

= = Illness = =

= = = Initial symptoms = = =

In 1870 , aged eleven , Ellen began work as a nursemaid in nearby Marlow , but she began suffering periods of somnolence and her employment was terminated . She was subsequently attended by a local doctor , Henry Hayman F.R.C.S. , from nearby Stokenchurch . Ellen had been suffering for 13 weeks from " glandular swellings " or an abscess on the back of her head , and symptoms consistent with a spinal disease . The family did not have much money , so the parish vicar , The Reverend Studholme , asked Hayman to secure Ellen 's admission to a local hospital , where her condition worsened . Ellen stayed at the hospital for 18 weeks before being " discharged as incurable " in March 1871 .

= = = Fall into unconsciousness = = =

According to Ellen 's mother , upon the girl 's return home on a rickety cart , she began to feel drowsy and had several seizures . Hayman states that it was two days after her discharge that the seizures occurred . He visited Ellen at her home , where he was told that the previous night , March 17 , Ellen had endured a series of such attacks , after which she turned to lie " on her left side , with her hand under her head , and the lower extremities drawn upwards " . It was in this position that ? her mother maintained ? Ellen remained for the duration of her sleep . Hayman visited Ellen many times over the next few years and he later said that he " never found her otherwise " .

Ellen became something of a tourist attraction for Turville . She was visited by journalists , medical professionals , religious personnel and the " plain curious " from across the country , many of whom donated money to Ellen 's family to be allowed to see her . Some paid to take cuts of Ellen 's hair , until the " supply " began to run out . A Bucks Free Press journalist recounted his visit :

Her breathing was regular and natural , the skin soft and the body warm , as in a healthy subject ; the pulse rather fast . The hands were small and thin , but the fingers quite flexible ; the body

somewhat emaciated ; the feet and legs like those of a dead child , almost ice cold ... the aspect of her features was pleasant , more so than might be expected under the circumstances ... her eyes and cheeks were sunken , and the appearance was that of death ... but although there was no colour on her cheeks , the paleness was not that heavy hue which betokens death .

A correspondent from The Daily Telegraph visited Ellen about 22 months after she fell ill . He wrote :

The girl 's face is by no means cadaverous . There is flesh on the cheeks , which have a pinkish tint , and there is some colour in the thin lips . The eyes are calmly closed , as though in healthy sleep . I ventured to raise one of the lids and touch the eye beneath ... but there was not even a quivering of the eyelash The girl 's [hand] was quite warm and moist , and the finger nails were neatly trimmed . The fingers are not the least bit stiffened ... It is not a skeleton hand , neither are any of the girl 's limbs so emaciated as , under the extraordinary circumstances alleged , might be expected The child 's body is very thin as compared with her limbs There is not much substance in her flesh , however ; it is soft and flabby ... [Her feet were] almost ice @-@ cold As regards the child 's breathing , it is so feeble that it is almost impossible to detect it ; you cannot feel it by holding the cheek to her mouth , and the only faintest flutter is felt when the hand is laid over the region of the heart .

By March 1873 , Ellen was believed to be suffering from starvation . At first , she had largely subsisted on port , tea and milk , given three times per day . After about 15 months ? while her mother was attempting to administer arrowroot ? Ellen 's jaw locked closed . Subsequently , according to Hayman , she was fed " wine , gruel and other things " using the " spout of a toy teapot inserted between two broken teeth " . The Daily Telegraph journalist expanded on Ellen 's feeding : " The feeding implements stand on a little table by the side of the stump bedstead , and , at first sight , give you the idea that they are toys placed there to attract her attention should she , by a merciful termination of her trance , presently awake to life . The toys in question are two tiny ' teapots ' , each not much larger than a full @-@ sized walnut and holding four small teaspoonfuls . One of these is filled with port wine , and the other with milk ... this quantity of liquid nourishment ... cannot weigh more than half an ounce ... " At this time , it was considered " manifestly out of the question to think of moving her " . How the family dealt with Ellen 's passing of urine and faeces is unclear , but in 1880 , Hayman said that Ann Frewen told him that no bowel movements had occurred for five years , and that approximately every four days " a somewhat large amount would pass from the bladder " .

= = = Scepticism = = =

Some visitors were sceptical of Ellen 's illness and attempted to uncover the alleged ruse through methods such as stabbing her with pins , to no effect . The Bucks Free Press journalist was suspicious of Ann 's practice of making visitors wait before seeing Ellen . Some neighbours were also " deeply sceptical " , as Ellen 's family was making a " healthy profit " from her illness . During summers , the family was taking as much as £ 2 per week (£ 180 as of 2016) . Others said they sometimes saw Ellen sitting by her window at night . Ann consented to " fair tests " , but further suspicions were raised because medical personnel were not allowed to remain for too long , and Ann did not want Ellen to be moved to a hospital . Nor was Ellen listed as an invalid during the 1871 census . Hayman said that Ann was reluctant to allow handling of her daughter by medical personnel because they often concealed sharp objects with which to " test [Ellen 's] powers of feeling " . Her parents had also " strenuously opposed " Hayman 's recommendation to run an electric current through Ellen 's sleeping body .

Much speculation appeared in the press as to the cause of Ellen 's illness ; some linked the case to that of Sarah Jacob , a girl from Wales who , her parents claimed , was able to survive without nourishment , through divine intervention . Sarah died of starvation in 1869 , and her parents were subsequently convicted of manslaughter . A journalist for The Observer commented , " It is to be hoped that [Sarah 's case] is known in the obscure village of Turville , where ? we are asked to believe ? a fresh case of miraculous trance has taken place [Ellen 's case] very much ... incites

suspicion of deliberate imposture . " One correspondent to The Times wrote , " It is by widespread publicity that such cases are multiplied , and it is difficult to overstate the harm thus done . These impostures exist through a morbid love of sympathy on the part of the children , or from the gains that accrue to the parents . Once begun , they soon pass into real disease . " Another said the " ridiculous mystery " could be resolved if only Ellen were transferred , over her mother 's continued objections , to a London hospital , a sentiment echoed by many . Claims that Ellen was suffering from a form of catalepsy ? a condition at the time considered " so rare that not one physician in a thousand has so much as seen a single case of it " ? were also disregarded as unlikely , as was any thought of religious ecstasy .

Nevertheless , Hayman affirmed , " every effort [had] been made to discover the deception , if any , but without effect . " The Home Secretary and local Magistrate corresponded about the case but the law was powerless to interfere , because despite accepting donations , Ellen 's family never asked for money outright , and she " was not represented as a ' fasting girl ' " , as Sarah Jacob had been . The Daily Telegraph journalist said , " [Ann Frewen] 's manner is that of a perfectly honest woman who would be too glad if her child could be restored to consciousness . " He spoke to neighbours , none of whom indicated anything other than trust in Ellen 's parents and Hayman , and claimed that the family was receiving no money from Ellen 's illness , although the latter point is contradicted by Hayman and others . The journalist concluded , " I have no medical knowledge , and [am] unqualified to give an opinion beyond what is justified by close observation of the ordinary kind . I went to Turville prepared to find an imposture . I have returned ? puzzled . "

= = = Recovery = = =

Ann Frewen died in May 1880 . The inquest into her death was held at the nearby Bull and Butcher public house , presided over by the county coroner , Frederick Charsley . Part of the inquest 's remit was to consider the matter of Ellen 's subsequent care . Thomas Frewen was reported as being " quite evasive " when the coroner asked him how Ellen was fed , and although Hayman testified to reaffirm his stance that Ellen 's illness was genuine , Reverend Studholme was less certain . However , he could not offer any evidence to this effect , even though he had made several unannounced visits to Ellen 's home . Charsley concluded that Thomas could not look after Ellen , as his job left him absent from their home all day , and that the other members of the household would be too busy with its upkeep . Therefore , he turned Ellen 's care over to her married sisters , Elizabeth Stacey and Grace Blackall , both of whom lived in Turville . The cause of Ann 's death was found to be oedema of the heart , from which she had been suffering for many years .

Five months later , Ellen awoke ; by November , she had " fully recovered " . By this time , Ellen was twenty @-@ one and claimed to remember nothing of the previous nine years . She otherwise suffered few long @-@ term effects , save for slightly stunted growth and a " weak eye " .

= = Later life and legacy = =

In 1886 , Ellen married Mark Blackall in nearby Fawley . In the censuses of 1891 and 1901 , the pair are listed as living in Barkham and Caversham , respectively . They had five children : Ann (b . 1888) , Elizabeth or Mable (b . 1889) , Gladys (b . 1890) , Sydney (b . 1896) and Gertrude (b . 1898) . Ellen and Mark appear in the 1911 census together with Sydney and Gertrude , all living in Lower Caversham . The census also records that they had six children of which one had died . The case of Ellen Sadler has remained a part of local folklore , spawning tales of witchcraft and rumours of royal attention in Turville . The Sadler family home became known as " Sleepy Cottage " , and was used for filming of the BBC situation comedy The Vicar of Dibley . No clear cause has ever been ascribed for Ellen 's condition ; modern diagnoses might include narcolepsy , or deliberate drugging , and the possibility that it was a hoax cannot be discounted . An embellished account of the story can be found in the 1973 collection , Witchcraft in the Thames Valley by Tony Barham .