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Familia 2021 LOUISA HACK (1873-1945) - FALLEN ANGEL?
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Nic was born in Malaya but attended a Cape Town private school from an early age. He went to UCT and Queens University in Canada before working as a geologist in the Free State and Brazil. After this he became part of the financial services industry, writing research on mining and resource companies both in South Africa and Australia. His favourite pastimes include fishing and wing shooting over his two German Pointers. He is married with two children and lives in Johannesburg.

Thelma Holland White (née Smith) was my grandmother. She was born on 21 December 1902 and died in March 1980. She was a very dominant person in my mother's early life. My mother, Barbara Spencer White, was born in 1927 and died in January 2021, just days short of her 94th birthday.

Thelma lost her mother when she was only six months old, followed by her father when she was 14 years old. For most of her childhood, from the age of eight to 20 years she was in the care of Louisa, her stepmother. The stepmother also had a daughter, Kathleen Ada, whom Thelma lived with during this time.

Despite the strong influence that her stepmother and stepsister must have had on her, Thelma passed on very little of those early years to Barbara. The only traces I had of them was a very limited narrative indicating a restricted and unhappy childhood.

At first, we paid little attention to this, since it was evident that Thelma was clearly not interested in family networks and ignored the many relatives that she had in Cape Town, to the point that my mother had very little or no recollection of them.

However, the more I thought about it and the more we found out about her childhood life, the more bizarre Thelma's behaviour seemed. Why was almost the entire memory of her childhood and even the existence of the stepmother so extensively censored? By contrast, Thelma was more than happy to divulge her secret romance to my mother on their many rambles around the Rondebosch common during the 40s.

We now know much more about the stepmother and the exceptional trials she faced. This included abandonment, the collapse of her family, raising an illegitimate child from an adulterous relationship, emigrating alone, acquiring a rare divorce and then suffering the death of two husbands.

I still have no answer to the question of why Louisa was viewed so negatively by Thelma, but now understand why Louisa emigrated to South Africa and the strategies she employed as unskilled woman with an illegitimate child to avoid destitution.

Finally, I was able to trace what happened to her and her daughter long after Thelma had walked out of their lives.

Louisa Hack

Thelma's stepmother was born Louisa Hack on 17 November 1873 into a family of at least seven children of which she was the second youngest. As was typical for such large families, there was a large age difference between the oldest and the youngest siblings. In the Hack household, the difference in ages was 21 years.^{1 2 3}

There were only two girls in the family. Her sister, Ada Maria, was a year older than Louisa and they would remain exceptionally close to each other for their entire lives.

The family lived in London, just south of the Thames in an area called Plumstead that was part of the Woolwich/Greenwich borough. They were obviously poor, like many of my English ancestors. The father, Alfred Joseph Hack, was a 'fitter' of steam engines although he would sometimes call himself an engineer.

The oldest son, Alfred James Hack, was born in 1861 when his mother Maria Moran was 20 years old. He also became an 'engineer' and worked for the Telegraph Wire Works. He was apparently unable to establish a family and we suspect that he was either mentally or physically handicapped as he stayed at home until he died at the age of 36 in 1897.⁴

The remaining children all entered into marriages during the 1890s and all married in the Anglican Church, which was a strong marker of a type of English identity and middle-class aspirations. Louisa was among the last of the family to marry in 1897, followed by her sister Ada Maria's marriage in 1898 to George Culham.^{5 6 7 8 9 10}

Louisa married William James Murrell who appears to have been an only child to Frederick and Sarah Murrell.¹¹

It is not often that we can find out how couples met, but the 1891 census shows that a 19-year-old William Murrell was boarding with a family on a street very close to Louisa's family. He was a hosier's assistant in the clothing trade so it is possible they met somewhere in the neighbourhood.

After their marriage, Louisa and William may have rented a house in Clapham for two years before moving back to Louisa's parents for another four years from 1901 to

¹ England and Wales Civil Registration Birth Index, 1873, Vol 1d Q4 p1021

² England Census 1881, 1891,1901

³ Baptism in Plumstead, London, Kent, Church of England 29.8.1875 p28 also dob

⁴ Deceased on line, Plumstead Cemetery Burial Register p179, 25th Sept 1879

⁵ Albert Frederick Hack married St Nicholas, Plumstead 6th April 1890

⁶ George Ord Hack England and Wales marriages Greenwich, London 1895 vol 1d, Q3

⁷ William Henry Hack married All Saints Church Wandsworth London 18th April 1897, p229

⁸ Ada Maria Hack married St Margarets (Parish Church CoE) Plumstead 11th August 1898 p100

⁹ Louisa Hack married St Andrews Church, Islington, Sept 1897 p195

¹⁰ UK Royal Hotel Chelsea Pensioner Admissions 1879 Pvt 38th Foot reg no 329

¹¹ UK Royal Hotel Chelsea Pensioner Admissions 1879 Pvt 38th Foot reg no 329

1904, clearly to save money. From here they moved to 89 Lupus Street on the north bank of the Thames.¹²

Louisa's life falls apart

By 1905, Louisa was 32 years old and her marriage to William had yet to produce children. The lack of children indicated that the marriage was not working well for Louisa. However, it got a lot worse when William abandoned her and moved out, leaving Louisa to pay the bills.

The first she heard of his intention to leave her was a telegram sent from Southampton on 1 April 1905 with these words ..."Off will write home goodbye for present dear cheer up Will." In anyone's book this is a heartless departure and a classic marker of what is now called 'spousal abandonment syndrome'.^{13 14}

This is just one example of several in our family history of abandonment or desertion of a wife and/or family. The huge surge in emigration from England during the early 1900s benefitted men looking for opportunities. In some areas Cornwall where a strong mining tradition existed, up to 25% of families had an absent father or husband. While most of these remitted money to their families and returned, many did not even leave a forwarding address.^{15 16}

Abandonment or desertion caused extreme poverty and hardship for many women, especially those with children or without strong family networks. Desertion was technically a criminal offence in many countries, but in practice it was impossible to enforce across borders. Very few statistics are available, but even today 5% of marriages in the UK fail because of 'spousal abandonment syndrome' that nowadays is softened by social parachutes like childcare, divorces and government assistance.¹⁷

Apart from this disaster, what must have really hurt Louisa badly was the fact that not only had her marriage fallen apart, the rest of her family was rapidly disintegrating.

It started with her sister emigrating to Rhodesia in 1906 to join George Culham who had become a farm manager in the Motopos near Bulawayo. In the same year her father died and her mother came to stay with her. Maria Moran endured for a year before she also died in August 1907. Then, within days, another of Louisa's brothers Albert Hack died as well.^{18 19 20 21}

Even before Louisa's mother died in August, her younger brother Robert Hack emigrated to Canada in May 1907. Shortly after, in September 1907, another brother, George Ord Hack also emigrated to the United States, eventually settling in

¹² London Electoral Registers, 1901 England Census

¹³ TAB Reference WLD 131/1911 Part 1

¹⁴ <http://lakelegal.co.uk/spousal-abandonment-syndrome/>,
<https://www.midlifedivorcerecovery.com/spousal-abandonment-syndrome/>

¹⁵ <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/conservation/world-heritage-site/delving-deeper/the-spread-of-cornish-mining-around-the-globe/cornish-mining-in-south-africa/>

¹⁶ L Trotter 19th Century Emigration From Cornwall
ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/18338/TrotterL.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

¹⁷ <http://lakelegal.co.uk/spousal-abandonment-syndrome/>

¹⁸ Ancestry emigration records London to Cape Town 1906 Mrs A Culham and Master Culham 5 years

¹⁹ England Wills and Administration 1906 Probate Summary Alfred Joseph Hack 239 Pounds 17th July 1906

²⁰ Deceased online Plumstead cemetery records 27th August 1907 entry 509

²¹ Deceased online Plumstead cemetery records 30th August 1907 entry 519

California. Following Louisa's husband lead, he also abandoned his wife and three teenage girls, one of whom had Louisa's name, and 'remarried' in the US to a 'metaphysician'. Both of these men survived into the 1950s.^{22 23 24 25 26 27}

So, in the space of three years, from 1905 to 1907, Louisa had lost her husband through abandonment, her father and mother as well as two brothers through death, and another two brothers and a sister to emigration. By the end of 1907, Louisa only had one sibling left in London.

Her abandonment by William Murrell and the fact that there were very few siblings around, as well as the fact that she was taking care of her mother, explain why Louisa became the sole inheritor of her mother's estate. The £250 she received was the accumulated life savings of her parents, and although it made her relatively wealthy for a while, as an unskilled woman she would not have been able to maintain any reasonable standard of living for long.²⁸

Louisa moves to Africa

From the few postcards that William sent home, seemingly to soften the blow of his departure, it was clear that William had emigrated to South Africa.²⁹

By 1907, Louisa was writing to William requesting money. He sent a letter advising Louisa to live with her sister Ada Maria Culham who was by then living in Rhodesia or Cape Town. She did so, paying for the passage herself.

She wrote to William after her arrival but he claimed he was unwell and then stopped corresponding completely.

Finally, in April 1911 she entered the magistrate's court in Wynberg. She requested that the Transvaal Supreme Court order William to provide support and restore her conjugal rights, failing which she wanted a divorce. Louisa claimed that not only was she abandoned, but that William gambled frequently and ill-treated her when he was 'in liquor'.³⁰

William was tracked down to the Fallick's private hotel in Germiston for the summons by the lawyer's representative. He repeated his lack of desire to return to Louisa. Unsurprisingly, he did not appear in court to defend the action. He was given the chance to rejoin his wife, but the due date passed and Louisa won her divorce and was awarded costs in July 1911.³¹

This elevated Louisa from being unusual to being very unusual. Only one couple in 500 divorced each other in 1910 in the UK, partly due to the expense of the legal work that put it well beyond the means of most couples and partly due to the fact that the grounds for divorce were stringent. At the time, only provable adultery, abandonment or physical abuse were the allowed grounds for a woman to get

22 Robert Hack Petition For US Naturalisation 1918,

23 Robert Hack Canada Arriving Passenger Lists

24 Ancestry Emigration Records, George Hack, ss Oceania, September 1907 London to New York

25 George Ord's abandoned Family Mary Hack and family England Census 1911

26 George Ord Hack and Emily Hack 1940 US census

27 Find a grave Robert Hack Michigan 1953, George Ord Hack California Certificate of Death June 1954

28 Maria Moran Hack Wills and Administration 1907

29 Affidavit in 1911 Divorce case TAB WLD 131/1911

30 Affidavit in 1911 Divorce case TAB WLD 131/1911

31 Ruling TAB WLD 131/1911

divorced. In 1911, the year that Louisa filed for her divorce, only 277 couples across the entire suite of South Africa's populations divorced through the legal process.^{32 33}
34 35

The Missing Facts

The narrative Louisa presented in her affidavit was not complete. There were some facts that she kept back... quite understandably.

Louisa implied in her affidavit that she had 'obeyed' William's instruction or request to move to South Africa in 1907. However, we know she remained in London after she had received her mother's inheritance in November 1907, in addition to maintaining her accommodations in Hanover Gardens/Lupus Street until at least mid-1909.³⁶

Another very large silence hangs over the fact that she fell pregnant whilst living in London – at the time that her husband was living in Germiston.

Falling pregnant outside marriage was unusual in Edwardian times. A hundred years earlier, a social system existed throughout Church parishes to force a man to pay money towards the upkeep of his child and these children were usually blended in to the women's direct family – only detectable by genealogists through records. By Edwardian times, fewer than 5% of childbirths were illegitimate and fewer still were born in adulterous relationships.³⁷

This fact does not mean that sex outside marriage in the Edwardian period was unusual as we have so often been led to believe. Far from it. In a 1913 study, it was found that 45% of women in Berlin had their first-born legitimate child less than seven months after marriage. Between 50% and 70% of unmarried women of child-bearing age were estimated to be having sex outside any civil or religious vows. These estimates may resonate with genealogists.³⁸

However, the real source of social concern was illegitimate children that were never absorbed into a family union. These offspring faced crippling poverty and malnutrition if born to poor women and artificially short lives from wealthier mothers concerned with their social standing. Illegitimate girls born to poor mothers were particularly vulnerable and 75% of Berlin's registered prostitutes were illegitimate in 1911.

So, the pregnancy must have been a cataclysmic event for Louisa. She was now 36 years old with no income and with an illegitimate child on its way to a potentially bleak future. Worse, if she had held hope of marrying the father, she was to be disappointed. With financial and social pressures rising, as well as real concerns about the future of her child, she probably chose to escape from her society by emigrating to Cape Town to re-join all that was left of her only real family – her sister Ada Maria.

32 <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/olympic-britain/housing-and-home-life/split-pairs/>

33 Data collected from SA National Archives

34 <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/divorce/>

35 www.jstor.org/stable/3786994?seq=1

36 London Electoral Registers 1910

37 Family Search, Illegitimacy in England

38 <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1226&context=jclc>
Borosino The Problem of Illegitimacy in Europe 1914

Louisa's daughter was born on 21 August 1909. However, although we know when Kathleen Ada was born, we don't know where. It is possible she was born in London, aboard the ship or in Cape Town. Archival research has only confirmed that she wasn't registered in Cape Town or Wynberg as legally required.^{39 40}

What is known is that Ada Maria lost her husband in July 1910.⁴¹ He died of pneumonia while working on a farm in the Motopos and his death probably dates Ada's and Louisa's final relocation to Cape Town. If this was the case, then Kathleen Ada was born in London without being registered.

Louisa remarries

Louisa can be considered lucky in getting her divorce. However, she enjoyed even more luck when she arrived in Cape Town. Despite being married, 37 years old and having an illegitimate baby, she started a relationship with a widower, Edward Henry Smith. She was almost certainly in the relationship with Edward when she applied for her divorce and it is also likely that he supported her legal effort with his money.

Just three months after the divorce was finalised, in September 1911, she married Edward.⁴²

Clearly, the last thing Louisa would have wanted is to see William Murrell back in her life and to have to live with him in Germiston. She must have been very happy not to see him appearing on her doorstep to restore her 'conjugal rights'.⁴³

Her luck extended to the fact that she was able to remarry in the Methodist Church in Wynberg. To understand this privilege, it has to be realised that all churches of the period were deeply hostile to marrying divorcees.⁴⁴

It was only in exceptional cases where the individual had a 'no fault divorce' (as Louisa had) that it would have been possible. However, the fact that Edward and Louisa, both Anglicans, married in an Methodist church suggests that they met resistance from the priest in the St John's Church in Wynberg. The existence of Kathleen as an Edwardian love child must have been kept secret, especially from the apparently tolerant Methodist minister.⁴⁵

It is interesting to note that existential pressures on the Methodist Church since the 1900s have made it reverse its philosophy completely, to the extent that divorced couples are now welcome. In 2002, some 64% of couples married in its UK marriages were divorced.⁴⁶

Edward Henry Smith also came attached with a child of his own, the eight-year-old Thelma Holland Smith, who became my grandmother. She was old enough to be aware that Louisa was not her biological mother, but Louisa would be the only woman to care for Thelma until she married at the age of 20.

39 Identity Search

40 Anne Clarkson, Professional Genealogist Personal Communications

41 Family Search; Zimbabwe Death Registers, Buluwayo Vol 12 1908-1910

42 TAB 131/1911

43 Family Search Wynberg marriage records, 2nd September 1911, Wesleyan Parsonage Register 9079

44 <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/divorce/>

45 <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/olympic-britain/housing-and-home-life/split-pairs/>

46 <https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-marriage-in-the-methodist-church-2002.pdf>

Louisa probably lived the next seven years of her life in reasonable happiness. The family was living in a part of Wynberg that is still attractive with many of her husband's family including her father- and mother-in-law close by.

On the other hand, Thelma remembered this period of her life in unhappy ways. She would visit nearby Wynberg Park by herself and she was sensitive to the fact that some boys ignored her for 'class' or 'wealth' reasons. Moreover, she seems to have felt alienated from her stepmother and 'half-sister' and overly disciplined. It is unclear whether Thelma was aware that Kathleen Ada was not even her half-sister but indeed her stepsister. It was one more fact that she censored from the family 'memory'.⁴⁷

Louisa's measure of happiness would have ended when Henry Edward Smith died in 1917 at the age of 44 years. She inherited his very modest estate, which must have provided some relief, as she once again no longer had an income to support her two children.

Louisa used her second marriage to create a new identity for her illegitimate child during this period. This is clear from Henry's probate records that show Louisa stating that Kathleen Ada was born two years before the marriage and her divorce.

Louisa remarries again

Upon Edward Smith's death, Louisa and her two dependants, Thelma and Kathleen, moved back to her sister Ada Maria and her only 15-year-old child Leslie Culham. They were then living in Albion Springs (now Newlands).

This combined and presumably, from Louisa's perspective, happy household lasted for two more years until Ada Maria married the 56-year-old Thomas Richard Butler in 1919. Thomas has a slightly enigmatic background. He was a Freemason, an 'engineer', also widowed with at least one child, named Thomas Richard Butler (II). Unsurprisingly, Thomas Richard Butler II also had a son called Thomas Richard Butler (III) and all three co-existed until the 1950s, which made genealogical research quite difficult.^{48 49}

Perhaps seeing the marital success of her older sister, and feeling perhaps isolated and financially vulnerable, Louisa Smith's luck turned again. Despite now being 47 years old and having two children to look after she was able to follow her sister to the marriage registrar in 1920.⁵⁰

Louisa obviously relied on a lot more than luck to secure her marriages. Unlike England, South Africa experienced a severe shortage of women, but we know she helped the odds in her favour by lying about her age in her marriage register signed with James Roberts. This tactic was quite common among women.^{51 52 53 54}

47 Family search Cape Province, Probate Records Masters of the High Court, 22 March 1917 007730915 1117/17

48 Family Search Anglican Marriage Records St Pauls 1919 Entry 467, 30th November 1919

49 Ancestry Masonic Records 1905 to 1921 Metro and Rondebosch Lodges

50 Family Search Civil Marriage Register Wynberg Municipality, 24th October 1920

51 www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/EW1911GEN/4

52 www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/report/EW1911GEN

53 www.statssa.gov.za/publications/SAStatistics/SAStatistics2000.pdf section 1.4, M/F ratios in the white population 1904 to 1911

54 www.jstor.org/stable/2964799?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents M/F ratios of >20 year old whites in Union 1911 Census

Her next husband James was a relatively young Englishman of 42 years. Probably not an ambitious man, he remained a constable throughout his career and was transferred in about 1922 from Rondebosch to Kalk Bay. It was here that Thelma was living when she married Allan Spencer White in Muizenberg in 1923.⁵⁵

As stated before, almost none of Thelma's experiences and memories of these early years with her 'stepmother', 'half-sister', 'stepfather' Roberts, 'step-aunt' Ada or Ada's son Leslie Culham were ever passed on to my mother... quite deliberately. Nor was any of Louisa's subsequent life ever mentioned. It is clear that Thelma vigorously closed the door on her stepfamily upon her marriage.

Interestingly, Thelma's marriage certificate shows that Louisa did not give the 20-year-old Thelma her parental permission to marry. Instead, the couple married with a licence. Perhaps this is an indication of Louisa's perspective on the marriage of Thelma.

Soon after Thelma had left the Robert's household, James Roberts – then in his late 40s – retired from police service due to ill-health. Louisa, James and Kathleen moved to Branko Road in Observatory, just below the Groote Schuur Hospital. They were preceded there by Louisa's sister and her husband where they lived next to each other in small cottages that still exist in virtually their original form.

Louisa's luck turned again, but this time for the worse. In 1928, James Roberts died at age 50, leaving Louisa as a widow for the second time. She was 55 years old, still supporting the 19-year-old Kathleen Ada and seemingly without even a police pension to fall back onto.⁵⁶

It is likely that Louisa continued to live in Observatory alongside her sister and her husband until Ada Maria died in 1933. Thomas Richard Butler (I) survived Ada by another 21 years, dying in Fish Hoek. However, it is probable that she took care of a boarding house during and after this period.^{57 58 59}

Ada's death must have been the bitterest pill of the many that Louisa had to swallow. It is clear that the close relationship between sisters had been an important part of Louisa's entire life.

Kathleen Ada finds her identity?

Researching Louisa's only natural child, Kathleen Ada, proved extraordinarily difficult. Nevertheless, she was still calling herself Kathleen Ada Smith upon marrying Francis Roy Lemiere in 1932.⁶⁰ The wedding was witnessed by her aunt, Ada Maria and Thomas Richard Butler, which shows how strong the connection between Kathleen and her aunt still was. Ada was to die a year later.

The marriage took place in the Congregationalist Church in Claremont, probably one of South Africa's prettiest churches. The denomination is obscure and linked to relatively puritanical English Protestant movements, but from it emerged a very well-known organisation in our history, the London Missionary Society (LMS). Some of the LMS missionaries like David Livingstone became household names and like another

55 Family Search Anglican Marriage records All Saints Church Muizenberg 12th January 1923

56 Family Search Civil Death Records Cape, James Roberts 8.1928, Woodstock

57 Family Search Cape Masters Probate 39852/1933, Observatory, Cape Town

58 KAB MOOC Vol 6/9/22262 Ref 1359/54

59 Personal communications Leon Lemiere April 2021

60 KAB MOOC Vol 6/9/22262 Ref 1359/54

famous missionary, Robert Moffat, preached in the Claremont Church a hundred years before.⁶¹

Kathleen's husband was a fitter and turner who came originally from Durban.⁶²

Her first child, Yvonne Frances Lemiere, was born in February 1935 in Cape Town, followed by the second child, Leon Roy Nelson Lemiere who was born in 1938 in Usakos. The family finally relocated to Durban in the early 40s.^{63 64 65}

Yvonne became a South African Railways 'scrutineer' and married a railways fireman in September 1956. Kathleen was a witness to the wedding. Intriguingly, she deliberately changed her maiden name in the marriage records to Robertson. This startling name change was never published in any gazette, nor was it stated when she married Francis, so it had no legal basis.⁶⁶

Possibly, just maybe, this was the name that was passed on to her by her mother Louisa, thus providing an identity of her real father. What we do know is that if she had any inkling of her origins, she never passed them on to her children.

Louisa's last years

Kathleen was the last remnant of Louisa's family and Louisa naturally followed her daughter when she moved to Durban in the early 1940's.

There was another reason to follow Kathleen to Durban. By 1939, Louisa had become ill from cancer, which would have made her increasingly dependent on her daughter's care. By the time she died in 1945 she had wasted away, suffering from nerve sheath tumours.⁶⁷

Louisa abandoned again?

Like James Roberts, Louisa died without a Death Notice. She undoubtedly had little money and probably no will. However, the lack of a Death Notice also reflects the fact that the person legally required to file a death notice did not do so, for any number of possible reasons.

The person who should have completed the form was Kathleen Ada, and we can only speculate why she neglected this requirement. As a result, Louisa's recorded age of 65 years at death was never corrected. She was in fact 72 years old. This 'error' made confirmation that it was really Louisa very difficult.

Louisa lies buried in Stellawood Cemetery in Durban. Kathleen's husband paid for the undertaker and the cost of the plot. The plot that was never re-used, had partly disappeared under trenches, chest-high grass and pools of black water when a search was made for it late in 2020.^{68 69}

The search confirmed that no tombstone was ever bought.

61 Congregational Church Marriage records, Claremont, Apr 3rd, 1932

62 <https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-marriage-in-the-methodist-church-2002.pdf>

63 Family Search Probate Records of the Master of the Cape High Court no 63402, 3rd Jan 1939 roll n007735679

64 HAWC Birth Certificate of Yvonne Francis Lemiere 1st Feb 1935

65 Identity Search Leon Roy Lemiere

66 Leon Roy Lemiere (Personal Communication)

67 FamilySearch Natal, Louisa Roberts Civil Deaths 27 May 1945 Durban entry 2493

68 FamilySearch Civil Records, Christ Church Durban 29th September 1956

69 Courtesy of eGGSA

The fact that Louisa's death was not recorded in a Death Notice, her passing in a small flat in Addington as well as the lack of any monument gives rise to the possibility that she had worn out her welcome and died neglected and alone.

It is fortunate that Louisa's grandson, Leon is still alive to help balance this interpretation. Katherine continued to look after her mother until the end in her very small flat along with her two young children and her affection for her mother also required the young family to travel by bus to visit Louisa's grave. Clearly, the lack of a monument reflected financial and not emotional exhaustion.⁷⁰

So, it appears that Louisa was not abandoned again, but ended her hard life in the care of the last of her family.

Fallen angel?

Louisa had an unfortunate life. The abandonment and almost complete lack of family network would have been enough to drive her into poverty if she had had children at the time. A woman of her age, lacking education or skills, had no other alternative but to consider remarrying or creating a de facto partnership.

The odds would have been stacked against her. In England, many women were abandoned or separated from husbands as opportunities for men opened up elsewhere. Louisa tried to secure a new partner but failed and fell pregnant instead.

Once pregnant her remaining options would have closed out. She was fortunate to inherit money and was determined or desperate enough to embark on a new life in South Africa at a relatively mature age. She was also lucky to have a sister in a similar position who could provide her with a home in her new world.

Her two marriages in South Africa were practical and successful steps to prevent her from falling into destitution and secured the future of her child. The death of her husbands was bad luck in the extreme, but natural enough for the period. However, from 1928 onwards she probably became reliant on a job in a boarding house and then later her daughter to survive.

The real Louisa?

What is less clear is what sort of person Louisa really was and how she treated her dependants. She certainly did come from a tough urban milieu and her experiences would hardly have softened her.

There are a few recorded facts for which we have no explanation. For one she was not an official witness at her daughter Kathleen's wedding in 1934, although her sister and husband were. She may well have been present at the wedding, but not being a witness at her own daughter's wedding was unusual for the times.

On the other hand, it is clear, that at least in the last part of Louisa's life and after her death, Kathleen thought well enough of her mother to the point of keeping a photograph of her on a table for many years after her death.

Thelma was clearly negative about Louisa, but being an orphan does raise the possibility that she was overly sensitive to Louisa as a stepmother. The only supporting fact I could find is that Louisa did not provide parental consent for

70 Stellawood Cemetery Records

Thelma's wedding in 1923, which required Allan Spencer to buy a licence. Nevertheless, she did attend the wedding as an official witness.

Unlike Kathleen, Thelma kept no photograph of either Louisa or Kathleen in her extensive collection. This and the fact that Kathleen's daughter destroyed all the family photographs means that it is unlikely that we will ever be able to put a face to Louisa.

The end of the lines – Louisa and Ada's descendants

Louisa's only child, Kathleen, lived a long life, but she too suffered from cancer of which she died in 1999 at the age of 90. Her ashes were scattered in Kirstenbosch.⁷¹

Kathleen's children may still be alive today; both live in South Africa, as do many of their children.

Ada Maria's only child, Leslie George Culham, married in 1924 in Rondebosch and was still living in Station Road in 1928. Like Kathleen's husband, he was a fitter and turner.⁷²

In fact, many people associated with Thelma and Louisa were involved with engines and metal-working skills, some of whom lived in Cape Town and would have worked in and around Woodstock and Salt River up until 1940. These include, Thelma's grandfather and father, at least one of Thelma's uncles, Leslie Culham, Francis Lemiere, the older Lemiere, Thomas Richard Butler I and Thomas Richard Butler II as well as Thomas Richard Butler II's son, Aubrey Butler. It seems likely that these English immigrants and their descendants who all lived in the Wynberg area knew or knew of each other.

Louisa herself was the daughter of an 'engineer' and several of her brothers were also described as fitters, although of course they never came to Cape Town.

Leslie moved to Johannesburg probably after Ada's death in 1933 and for some years lived in Parkhurst for some years with his wife Isabel Pauline until she died in 1969. It is possible that their only descendant Pauline Buisson is still alive. Almost certainly, some of her children still live in Johannesburg today.⁷³

71 Leon Lemiere, Personal Communications April 2021

72 Identity Search, Leon Lemiere, Personal Communications April 2021

73 TAB MHG 2129/69