

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Interviewee: **Nicola Mitchell** (NM)

Date: 23rd September 2025

Interviewer: Ju Mackrell (JM)

Location: At Ju's house

Other people present: None

Audio files: Nicola Mitchell oral history



Note that the following is a verbatim transcript of what was spoken in the recording. Our best efforts have been made to capture and represent the interview in its entirety, though there is the possibility of error.

NM: My name is Nicola Mitchell. I'm 54 and I was born and raised in Twerton. My family have a long history with Bath going back over 200 years and it was whilst researching my ancestor, the Mills family, who are from my maternal side, I discovered family stories of success and heartache that sadly ended with deaths in the Bath Union workhouse for three members of my family.

Aaron Mills and Isaac Mills are my three times great uncles. Both Aaron and Isaac Mills were born in Stanton Prior to John Mills and Sarah née Renford, a girl from neighbouring Burnett. Whilst telling their stories, I will also give you a little bit of information on their sister Sarah Mills, who is my three times great grandmother. Isaac Mills, also known as Jack, was born in Marksbury in 1813 and died in the Bath Union Workhouse in January 1867 and was buried in the burial ground there. He had married Celia Ham in Twerton Parish Church on the 15th of August 1841. He was classed as a labourer and she was a straw bonnet hat maker. They had two sons. In 1861, they were recorded as living in 2 Holloway with a household of 17 people in four households. Celia seems to have stayed in Holloway area after Isaac died in the workhouse. Again, although an assumption, I wonder, is it because he was unwell and they couldn't afford private medical treatment, which I knew had been common in 1867. Celia died in January 1893 and at that point was living in 1 Paradise Row.

Sarah Gingle Mills is my three times great grandmother. She was born on the 14th of June 1818 in Stanton Prior, and she is the direct link to my family. I know Sarah had two sons and the reason I'm telling her story, she had Samuel Flower Mills, born in 1842 in Englishcombe, and the other son, who is my great-granddad, Benjamin Mills, was born 1844, again in Englishcombe. Both boys on their birth certificates are classed as illegitimate, and this is what piqued my interest, as that would have been a difficult thing for somebody to have declared at the time. On research, there appears to have been a neighbour, however, called Samuel Crew Flower, and I guess we can assume that he was the father of the boys

because of their middle names. But no marriage was ever found between the two and Samuel Crew Flower died at a young age in 1845 at the age of 24.

Onto Aaron Mills. Aaron Mills was born on the 23rd of July 1820 in Stanton Prior. Aaron was nine when his father died and his mother remarried to a George Penny and they moved to Englishcombe. In 1841 we find Aaron living with them and working as a labourer. We first find more stories on him in the newspapers after a poaching incident on the Carr's estate from the 9th of December 1852. On the 5th of April 1847 Aaron married Elizabeth Hucklebridge from Twerton at Twerton Parish Church and they settled into married life in Rush Hill. Aaron was working as a labourer gardener and had bought a small plot of land to grow vegetables to sell. His wife Elizabeth never seems to have worked and there were no children from the marriage.

The story that piqued my interest, however, was there seemed to have been a few incidents with the law between them. And on the 8th of November 1867, a newspaper article headlined 'Assault on Wife' was found. Elizabeth appears to have been a heavy drinker and on the evening of 8th November neighbours had heard screams and on inquiring they found Elizabeth with her clothing on fire and had noted that Aaron had been seen leaving the property shortly before. With the fire put out nothing further occurred until Aaron was seen to return later that night. On returning and just after midnight neighbours again heard Elizabeth screaming Murder! and Aaron was seen attacking her with a broomstick until it broke. Next morning, which is incredible to think, the same neighbours had seen Aaron go to work but no sign of Elizabeth, and assuming she was dead, the police were summoned and Aaron, on his return from work, was arrested for attempted murder. During the trial, Elizabeth made it clear that Aaron wasn't to blame and her behaviour was the problem, and her clothes had caught fire from a match. The judge, having listened to both, sent Aaron to Shepton Mallet Prison for three months and explained that it was her drunken behaviour that had made his home life miserable. I visited Shepton Mallet Prison and his three months there must have been horrific.

Sadly, there were other crimes that were reported in newspapers on both of their behalves and the next time I heard of Aaron was his death and burial confirmation on the 29th of April 1886 at the Bath Union workhouse. A sad end for any person but his life through faults seemed to have been extremely hard. His wife Elizabeth was in the workhouse from 1886 and died there in October 1898, a long time to have been instituted there and whilst Aaron was still alive they had obviously been separated. Their younger brother, Richard Mills, was the success in this family. He went on to become the owner of Willsbridge Mill.

So today, I remember Aaron Mills, Elizabeth Mills, Isaac Mills, and all those others who sadly met their end in the Bath Union workhouse and were buried in unmarked graves.