

2684 Two bodies in a coffin

Ann (birth spelling) was born in 1859. She was the daughter of John Gould and Eliza Clements. She was baptised on 4 December 1859 in Wheatley. In 1871 Ann (age 12) was living with her parents and siblings in Wheatley. Her father was working as a labourer. Anne married William Smith (a water cress cutter from Lewknor) on 16 October 1876 in Wheatley.

In the 1881 census, and now known as Annie (age 21, labourer's wife), was living with her two young children in Crown Road, Wheatley,. Her parents and siblings were in the adjacent household. Annie's husband William was not recorded as part of the same household but was instead recorded on the census with his parents in Lewknor, where he and his father were carrying on their watercress business.

In the 1891 census Annie (age 31) was living with her 3 children in Wheatley. She is recorded as married rather than widowed but her husband is again not recorded as part of the same household. Her sister Martha and brother-in-law Isaac Davies were living in the adjacent household.

Later in 1891 Annie gave birth to a baby son who did not survive and she did not have means to pay for a proper burial. She was attended at the birth by her mother Eliza Gould who acted as a midwife to local women. The case was written up in the local press as Annie asked her sister-in-law (Annie Gould, see next para) whose infant daughter had recently died whether her son's body could be secretly placed in the same coffin as her daughter. Following rumours in the village the coffin was exhumed from St Mary's churchyard and the 2 bodies found instead of one. Charges were made but a jury found Eliza and Annie not guilty (although the body had not been properly disposed of this was not in itself a crime, for a crime to have taken place there needed to have been intent to conceal that a birth had taken place). Newspaper reports of the case confirm that Annie was separated from her husband so it is unclear who was the father of the child.

Sister-in-law Annie Gould (nee Young), from Newport, was married to Annie Smith's brother Thomas. The other baby in the coffin was their 18-day old daughter, Eliza. They were only fleetingly in Wheatley.

In the 1901 census Annie (age 41) was recorded as being a widow and was living with her four children and a boarder in Walthamstow.