

Ethel Lina White

Introduction by **Martin Edwards** to “*Water Running Out*” a short story that appears in *Crimes of Cymru, Classic Mystery Tales of Wales*, British Library, 2023.

Ethel Lina White (1876-1944) was born in Abergavenny and – as a woman who eschewed personal publicity during her lifetime – she would no doubt be astonished to discover that her birthplace in Frogmore Street is now marked by a blue plaque. This recognition highlights the intrinsic merit of her novels of domestic suspense but there is more to it than that. Her writing was vivid and atmospheric and ideally suited to adaptation for film or television. Of all the screen versions of her work, the most famous is the classic Hitchcock movie *The Lady Vanishes*, based on *The Wheel Spins*, which has also been adapted for television and the stage. *Some Must Watch*, set in Welsh border country, was also memorably filmed as *The Spiral Staircase*.

Ethel's father William was a successful builder. His experiments with cement and bitumen led to his inventing Heiga Rock, a waterproof building material which was used for construction work on the London Underground and made him a rich man. He built new family home, Fairlea Grange, in Belmont Road and Ethel was still living there in her mid-thirties at the time of the 1911 Census. For a few years thereafter she worked in the Ministry of Pensions before concentrating on writing. She died of ovarian cancer in 1944 and because of her fear of being buried alive (reflected in her novel *The First Time He Died*) she bequeathed her entire estate to her sister “on condition she pays a qualified surgeon to plunge a knife into my heart after death”.



Sources of Information on Ethel Lina White

Gwent Local History Journal No 133 May 2023 http://gwenthistory.org.uk/?page_id=150

Alex Scurko - *An Overlooked Heritage: The Life and Work of Abergavenny-born Writer Ethel Lina White*

Abergavenny Street Survey

<http://www.abergavennystreetsurvey.co.uk/ethel-lina-white/>

Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_Lina_White

BBC News Wales

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-59550580>

Golden Age of Detection Wiki

<http://gadetection.pbworks.com/w/page/7932464/White%2C%20Ethel%20Lina>

Birth

April, May and June 1876 - White, Ethel Lina, Abergavenny, 11a 60

Baptism

April 26 1876, Ethel Lina White, born 2 April 1876, daughter of William White, builder and Charlotte Eliza White, No 4 Derry View Abergavenny

1881 Census

39 Frogmore Street Abergavenny - William White, head, builder, Elizabeth White, wife, Florence, Ada, Herbert, Mabel, Ethel (5yrs), Sidney, Roland, Wilfred + two servants

1891 Census

Fairlea, Belmont Road Abergavenny - William White, head, Patentee & Maker of Hygeian Rock Building Composition, Elizabeth White, wife, Florence, Ada, Herbert, Mabel, Ethel (15yrs), Sidney, Roland, Wilfred, Annis, Marjorie, Richmond + two servants

1901 Census

Fairlea, Belmont Road Abergavenny - Eliza White, widow, head, Hygeian Rock Building Comp: Manufacturer, Mabel, Ethel (24yrs), Sidney, Roland, Wilfred, Annis, Marjorie, Richmond + one servant

1911 Census

Fairlea, Belmont Road Abergavenny - Eliza White, widow, head, Hygeian Rock Building Comp: Manufacturer, Ethel (35yrs), Wilfred, Annis, Marjorie, Richmond + two servants

1921 Census

65 Sternhold Avenue, Streatham, Wandsworth – Ethel Lina White, head, Author (45yr): Annis Dora White, sister, Private Secretary: Marjorie Hilda White, Sister, Artist

1939 Register

2 Arlington Park Mansions Hounslow – White Ethel Lina, single, novelist: White Annis Dora, single, Private Secretary, ARP warden

Death

July August and September 1944, White Ethel L. 68, Brentford, 3a 328

1944 Probate record

White Ethel Lina of 2 Arlington Park Mansions Chiswick London W.4, spinster, died 13 August 1944. Probate Llandudno 30 October to Annis Dora White spinster. Effects £5737 5s 9d.

Birthplace of Ethel Lina White

Abergavenny Street Survey

<http://www.abergavennystreetsurvey.co.uk/37b-frogmore-street/>

History Points

<https://historypoints.org/index.php?page=novelist-ethel-whites-birthplace-abergavenny>

Fairlea and The Hygeian Rock Composition

British Listed Buildings -

<https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300002755-fairlea-abergavenny>

Fairlea Grange can now be booked as a 9-bedroom holiday let - <https://www.fairleagrangeco.uk/> This website has lots of photographs of the interior of Fairlea.

