



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL



MISS HANNAH ROSBOTHAM.
(The Only Lady Recipient of an Albert Medal.)

Hannah Rosbotham (1858-1935) was awarded the Albert Medal for gallantry by Queen Victoria for a brave act of heroism on Friday 14 October 1881.

The first recipient of the St Helens Borough Council Blue Plaque Scheme, launched on 12 July 2024.

An act of bravery

On 14 October 1881, a violent storm raged across St Helens. At Sutton National School, a young school mistress - Miss Hannah Rosbotham - was teaching a class when the 'gale of terrific fury' dislodged the school belfry; sending stones, a large metal bell, and heavy debris down into one of the school's classrooms.

In recognition of her heroic act, Hannah Rosbotham became the first woman to ever be awarded a medal for gallantry when she received the Albert Medal. She was the only woman to ever have this decoration conferred by Queen Victoria.

Article from the London Gazette, 16 December 1881.



Whitehall, December 13, 1881.

THE Queen has been graciously pleased to confer the Albert Medal of the Second Class on—

MISS HANNAH ROSBOTHAM, 23 years of age, Assistant Schoolmistress, Sutton National Schools.

The following is an account of the services in respect of which the decoration is recommended:—

During a violent gale of wind on the 14th of October last, the stone belfry of the Sutton National Schools was blown down, and fell through the roof into the Infants' School-room (where nearly two hundred children were assembled), causing the death of one, and injuring many others, and filling the room and its gallery with stones, slates, and timber.

Whilst others fled for safety, MISS ROSBOTHAM (who at the time of the accident was teaching elsewhere) deliberately entered among the falling mass and cloud of dust; and, while fully conscious of the extreme danger to which she was exposed, remained on the spot until every child had been placed in safety.

At the imminent risk of her own life, MISS ROSBOTHAM removed four infants who were partially covered with the débris, and rescued therefrom a little girl who was completely buried, and who must inevitably have been suffocated had not such gallantry been displayed.

Medals and recognition

Hannah Rosbotham received the Albert Medal from Queen Victoria in December 1881.

‘For Gallantry in Saving Life on Land. Presented in the name of Her Majesty to Hannah Rosbotham for exhibition of great gallantry in the destruction of the belfry of Sutton National Schools 14th October 1881.’

The school and local people were so grateful to Hannah that they collected over £13 to pay for a solid silver pocket watch, inscribed with a message of thanks from the community.

‘To Miss Hannah Rosbotham from the Managers of the Sutton National Schools and other residents. To express their sense of her courageous behaviour in rescuing the school children during the gale of October 14th 1881 that destroyed the roof of the school, and for which act of bravery she has been awarded the Albert Medal by Her Majesty. January 11th 1882.’



Who was Hannah Rosbotham?

Page 28] The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the

* Civil Parish [or Township] of <i>Sutton</i>		City or Municipal Borough of <i>St Helens</i>	Municipal Ward of <i>East Sutton</i>	Parliamentary Borough of	Town of <i>St Helens</i>	Village or Hamlet, &c., of	Local Board, or [Improvement Commissioners District] of	Ecclesiastical District of <i>St Nicholas</i>		
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES In- habited (11, or ed (12))	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON- DITION	AGE of		Rank, Profession, or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN	Whether 1. Deaf and Dumb 2. Blind 3. Imbecile or Idiot 4. Lunatic
						Male	Female			
130	3. <i>New Street</i>		<i>William Widd</i>	Son	Widow	22	✓	<i>Farmer's Son</i>	<i>Lancashire St Helens</i>	
			<i>Ann Widd</i>	Servant	Widow	19	✓	<i>Widow</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Elizabeth Feather</i>	do	do	74	✓	<i>General Servant (Domestic)</i>	<i>do do</i>	
131	2.	1	<i>Margaret Johnson</i>	Head	Widow	81	✓		<i>do do</i>	
132	6.	1	<i>Peter Rosbotham</i>	Head	Widow	42	✓	<i>Glass Butler</i>	<i>Shelton, Warrington</i>	
			<i>Elizabeth do</i>	Wife	Widow	40	✓		<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Thomas Rosbotham</i>	Son	Widow	46	✓	<i>Glass Painter</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Mary Ann do</i>	Son		12	✓	<i>Scholar</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>John Joseph do</i>	Son		9	✓	<i>do</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Hugh do</i>	do		4	✓	<i>do</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Frederic do</i>	Son		5	✓	<i>do</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>James do</i>	Son		1	✓		<i>do do</i>	
			<i>John Parr</i>	Boarder	Widow	46	✓	<i>Glass Butler</i>	<i>do do</i>	
133	10.	1	<i>Francis Helsby</i>	Head	Widow	28	✓	<i>Widow</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Mary do</i>	Wife	Widow	29	✓		<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Mary Elizabeth do</i>	Son		5	✓	<i>Scholar</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Mary do</i>	do		3	✓	<i>do</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Kate Ellen do</i>	do		11	✓		<i>do do</i>	
134			<i>Katherine Edith Knight</i>	Lodger	Widow	28	✓	<i>National Schoolmistress</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Edgar Ann Thelma</i>	Lodger	Widow	74	✓	<i>do do</i>	<i>do do</i>	
135	12.	1	<i>Samuel Kelshaw</i>	Head	Widow	54	✓	<i>Farmer 19 acres of land</i>	<i>Lancashire Bold</i>	
			<i>Elizabeth Rusbery</i>	Servant	Widow	37	✓	<i>Domestic Servant</i>	<i>do do</i>	
136	30.	1	<i>John Yates</i>	Head	Widow	28	✓	<i>Labourer in glass Works</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Margaret Mary do</i>	Wife	Widow	26	✓		<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Elizabeth do</i>	Son		6	✓	<i>Scholar</i>	<i>do do</i>	
Total of Houses..		5	Total of Males and Females..		10	15				

* Draw the pen through such of the words as are inappropriate.

Hannah Rosbotham was born in 1859 to parents Peter and Elizabeth. The 1871 census record above shows her living with her parents and five siblings plus a lodger in New Street, Sutton.

Hannah's younger brother John Joseph Rosbotham was also commended for bravery; receiving a Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Society medal for rescuing a young man who had fallen through the ice at St Helens Reservoir, on 13 March 1886, and a Port Sunlight Order of Conspicuous Merit for rescuing a lady from drowning at Leasowe, Cheshire, on 17 August 1911.

In 1887, Hannah Rosbotham married James Parr at St Nicholas Parish Church in Sutton; they had no children of their own but many nieces and nephews, one of whom is shown to be living with them in the 1921 census.

A few years after her act of bravery, Hannah Rosbotham became the Headmistress of Sutton National School. She taught there for over 40 years until she retired in 1922. She died on 15 August 1935 and is buried in the churchyard of St. Nicholas's Church.

Where was Sutton National School?



Sutton National School map 1894 and photograph of infants 1895

Sutton National School was built on Ellamsbridge Road, Sutton in 1864. It was known locally as ‘Sutton Nash’. The building was eventually demolished in 1973.

Formerly Sutton Children’s Centre, Sutton Family Hub is built on the former site of Sutton National School and opened in November 2023. Family Hubs and Children's Centres are welcoming, friendly and safe places for families where parents and their children can go to access support, information and services in one place.

Close by is Sutton Oak Primary School in Goodban Street, which opened in September 1993.

What is a blue plaque?



A blue plaque is a permanent sign installed in a public place to commemorate a person, building or event and a link to that site, becoming a historical marker and a recognition of significance. A blue plaque marks the importance of a site and links the past to the present. An 'official' scheme is run by English Heritage; regional schemes are administered by organisations throughout the UK.

St Helens Borough Council launched a Blue Plaque scheme in July 2024, to honour and acknowledge the individuals, places and events that have contributed to the unique heritage across the whole of the borough. Coordinated by the Archive & Heritage team, it is planned to install a small number of plaques each year, with nominations encouraged from the public.

To find out more about the heritage of St Helens or to nominate a blue plaque recipient:

www.sthelens.gov.uk/archives

www.sthelensheritagehub.org.uk