

Keynsham Celebrities 1911

Compton Dando

Dear Mrs Matthews

Just a line to say how much I liked the photo of old Jim & Sis Bees. They was born at Compton up top Hill called Robin's Hill in a very small & small house over 800 year old with only 2 Rooms, one up 1 down so mother died when they was quite young so they sleep in the there bed like baby, in a cot together there father took milk to Bristol every day by Waggon horse that is over 50 year ago for I was a friend of the family then

There photo was taken at Keynsham 40 years ago outside Old Bromsey meat shop then they are dress in their Sunday dress for that was only what they wear when they went out together Sis was very fond of Bones for making Soup then so near to Bones shop the photo taken you may have read in the some paper Mrs Ames Remember, the price of Coal that Mr Jonas Godfrey then was got for 2 1/2 small 4 1/2 half stone 6 1/2 all large cut them no stones it was coal then so I hope that will give a little news of just Mrs Matthews I am over 81 year cannot get about now your truly
Annie Barnes

In the archives of the Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society there is a letter sent to a Mrs Matthews sometime in the 1940s/50s, by 81 year-old Annie Barnes which gives the details of a pair of people dressed in an anachronistic fashion at the turn of the century.

But who were these people?

The couple, referred to as Jim and Sis Bees, are caught in their Sunday best on the streets of Keynsham and the letter maintains that they were born in an 800 year-old one-up-one down cottage at the top of Robin's Hill in Compton Dando.

It adds that their mother Elizabeth died when they were quite young; but on further investigation it appears that she died early in 1898 and was buried at St Mary's, Compton Dando, on 16 February - so at the time Jim was in fact 37 and Sarah 34!

It also adds that they slept together in a cot presumably because of the lack of space in the tiny cottage.

The Parish Register of St Mary's Church Compton Dando records that Jim was baptised 'William James' on 11 November 1860, the son of a labourer James Bees and his

wife Elizabeth, and his sister Sarah followed four years later on 18 December 1864. At the time their father was a shepherd probably working for Edward Harding at Green Farm.

James is recorded in 1861 as being 6 months old and 1871 finds the family still in Compton Dando. James is then 10 and Sarah 6.

In 1881 the parents are at 'Fox Hole' with daughter Sarah whilst James aged 20 is working away as a labourer at Staunton Lane, Whitchurch boarding with a Thomas Constable and his wife.

The 1891 census records the couple back living with their parents, James aged 67 and Elizabeth aged 69, on Robin's Hill, Compton Dando. James is now referred to as 'William' aged 30, an agricultural worker and Sarah aged 20. Eight years later their mother Elizabeth died early in 1898 and was buried at St Mary's on 16 February.

In 1901 he is named as William J Bees aged 40 living in "Foxes Hole" next to New Farm employed as an "ordinary agricultural worker" born in Compton Dando and his sister Sarah is 36.

Their father is recorded as James Bees aged 77, a shepherd by then a widower and also born in Compton Dando although the letter quoted states that he drove a wagon to Bristol every day delivering milk. However he died five years later and was buried at St Mary's in April 1905 aged 81.

Presumably they lived in a tied cottage and his death would have made them homeless. So by 1911 James Bees and his sister Sarah have moved into a property in Bath Street (now Bristol Road), Keynsham. He is also known for some reason as 'Arthur' aged 50 and an agricultural worker and Sarah is aged 46. Both remain single and the caption on their photograph has made them 'Keynsham Celebrities 1911'. The letter also refers to Sarah's liking for soup made with bones bought from Brownsey's butcher's shop on Bath Hill.



Jim & Sis Bees from Compton Dando

an "ordinary agricultural worker" born in Compton Dando and his sister Sarah is 36.

But James or 'Jim' did not survive long at this address and his sudden death on Bath Hill was subject to an inquest as is necessary in these circumstances -

Western Daily Press reported on Wednesday 01 July 1914...

"Keynsham. An inquest was held yesterday, at the Police Court, by Dr. Samuel Craddock (Coroner for the Northern Division of Somerset) upon the body of Williams James Bees, a farm labourer, aged 54 years, of Bath Hill, Keynsham, who was found dead in bed Sunday afternoon last.

Dr. William Peache Taylor, of Station Road, Keynsham, stated that the deceased suffered from disease of the heart. The jury returned verdict in accordance with the medical evidence. The jury gave their fees to the sister."

William James Bees was buried in Keynsham Cemetery on 1 July 1914 aged 54 but his sister Sarah survived him until her burial on 10 October 1923 aged 60.

by Brian Vowles 2019