

THE LOCK KEEPERS OF BASWICH

WILLIAM SMITH: 1836/1837 to 1839/1840

Researched and written by

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William Smith was the Lock Keeper from about 1836 until 1840. He was probably initially employed by the Moat Colliery Company and then by the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company after they took over the Lease in 1838.

He was the son of William and Hannah Smith and was born in Knightley, a small hamlet a couple of miles north of Gnosall about six miles west of Stafford. He was baptised at Holy Trinity Church Eccleshall on 4 June 1809.

William married **Ellen Brown** at All Saints Church in Wellington (Shropshire) on 27 December 1834. Ellen was from Edgmond near Newport (Shropshire), only about 7 miles from Knightley and relatively close to where William was born.

The couple had six children, all girls.

The eldest was **Emily**. She was born within a year of marriage and was baptised at St Nicholas' Church in Newport on 6 December 1835.

The family moved to the Lock House around 1836/1837 and lived there for about four years. At present we do not know what his duties as Lock Keeper were, so although one can speculate about his duties, it is best that these speculations should not be written down in case they cloud future realities.

The next two children were probably born at the Lock House and they were baptised at Holy Trinity Church Baswich – **Mary** on 30 July 1837 and **Ann** on 22 September 1839. The Church Register records that they were the daughters of William and Ellen Smith of the Lock House and that their father was classed as a labourer. Over the years William was variously described as a labourer, an agricultural labourer or a quarryman.

By the time their next child **Ellen** was born, the Family had moved from the Lock House to Milford. She was baptised at Baswich on 9 May 1841 and was recorded as being two months old when the 1841 Census was taken on 6 June. The Census stated that William was an agricultural labourer.

However, all was not well and, in common with many children in Victorian times, young Ellen did not survive to her first birthday, she died aged ten months and was buried in the churchyard at Holy Trinity on 14 January 1842.

William and Ellen had two other children, **Susanna** and **Sarah**. Susanna was baptised at Baswich on 5 May 1844 and Sarah on 10 January 1847.

Clearly William and Ellen regarded Holy Trinity Church Baswich as their Family Church and, no doubt, the Church was a central part of their lives.

At the time of the 1851 Census on 30 March, William and Ellen were still at Milford with their three youngest children; Ann (11), Susanna (6) and Sarah (4). William was again recorded as an agricultural labourer. Emily and Mary had left home and had entered domestic service.

Emily (15) was in Camberwell (London) and was a servant to John Hogg (a theological student of Kings College at the University of London) and his Family.

Mary (13) remained close by, and was in Stockton where she was a servant in the household of William Stubbs – a maltster and farmer of 70 acres. Mary was employed as a nurse to look after the family's two children; John Stubbs aged 3 and his brother James who was just two months.

Ten years later, the 1861 Census (7 April) records William and Ellen living at 7 Pool Lane, Brockton, and confirmed that he was still an agricultural labourer. Daughters Susanna (17) and Sarah (14) were still at home. Also staying over that night was Martha Oakley (37), a relative of Ellen's from Edgmond.

Daughter Ann (21) had now left home and was a servant in the household of Charles Robotham, a draper and silk weaver, at 42 Gaolgate Street (St Marys) in Stafford.

Eldest daughter Emily (25) had returned to Stafford from London and was living in Castle Road (Castle Church) as a general servant in the household of Frederick Cowes, a civil engineer.

Sadly, William's wife Ellen died of acute bronchitis on Tuesday 19 January 1864 – life was more precarious in those days before the advent of antibiotics and modern health care. She was only 57 and was laid to rest in the Parish Church the following Monday. At the time, William was a "quarryman". He probably worked at the stone quarry on the Brocton Estate of George Chetwynd.

The couple had been fortunate that five of their six children had survived into adulthood. At least two of their children married: Emily – to Moses Bate on 24 December 1862 at Baswich and Sarah – to William Day on 22 June 1868 at Whitchurch (Shropshire). On Emily's marriage certificate, her father was one of the witnesses and he put his mark (an "X") on the certificate, suggesting that he was unable to write.

By the 1871 Census (2 April) William had remarried and was living in Brocton. All his children had left the family home. He was 62 and his new wife Ann, who was a tailoress from Walsall, was three years older. William was again recorded as being an agricultural labourer. Because of their ages, it is unlikely that William and Ann had any children together.

According to the 1881 Census (3 April), William and Ann were living at Milford Common. William's occupation was stated as a "Quarry Man (Stone)".

Their happiness was short-lived; William was widowed for a second time. Ann died aged 78 and was buried in Holy Trinity Church on 25 April 1883.

In all probability, William moved from Milford soon afterwards, to live with his daughter Sarah and her family at 14 Peel Street, Castle Church.

William survived his second wife by just 14 months. He died of “pulmonary phthisis” (tuberculosis/consumption) on 11 June 1884 aged 76.

He was buried at Holy Trinity Church Baswich on Monday 16 June 1884.



Holy Trinity Church, Baswich (2010)

Sources of Information

- (a) Census Records 1841-1881, and other documents including
- (b) Parish Records (Shropshire Archives and Staffordshire Record Office).

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