

WILLIAM BARROW (1847-1930)
BY KATH BOOTHMAN

This is the story of one of the more fortunate postal workers. In contrast to the multitude of Post Office employees whose work undermined their health and sometimes led to an early grave, William Barrow (1847-1930) served as a postman for thirty-three years and then, despite having retired on grounds of ill-health, lived for a further twenty-nine years as a pensioner.

William lived in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, and was a town postman. He lived in the town centre, a few minutes' walk from the main Post Office. Cheltenham was then a small town with a population in 1871 of around 53,000 people. The discovery of medicinal waters in the 18th century had led to its development as a spa, attracting many visitors especially in the summer months. In the mid-19th century, when the new fashion for sea bathing began to draw people away to the coast, its fortunes were boosted by the foundation of three large public schools: Cheltenham College (1841), Cheltenham Ladies' College (1853) and Dean Close School (1886).

The town was quite prosperous and it became a retirement destination for people whose working lives had been spent abroad in the service of the Empire or the Indian Army. The presence of so many well-to-do potential customers brought an influx of tradespeople and artisans of all kinds in the later years of the century, and for families such as William's – his father a shoemaker, his mother a bonnet-maker – there was a good living to be made. (William's ancestors on both sides were agricultural labourers, so the family had already taken a step up in the world). Better employment prospects were probably the reason why William's parents, who came from Cheltenham but spent the first years of their married life in Bristol and Portsmouth, returned to settle in the town. They did not leave it again.

William was the eldest of five children. His brothers Albert and Alfred were four and seven years younger, his sisters Martha and Rose twelve and fourteen years younger. Alfred died at the age of fifteen and Rose died in infancy. Curiously, Alfred was buried in un-consecrated ground, implying that he had not been baptised. No baptism records have been found for Alfred, Martha or Rose either. William was baptised in Bristol where he was born, although his mother's maiden name appears on the certificate, indicating that his parents were not married at the time (they married a year later). Of the remaining siblings, Albert's record gives us a clue to William's possible appearance, if he resembled his brother: at the age of nineteen Albert served a week in prison for indecent exposure, and was described as 5ft 8ins tall with brown hair and light blue eyes. It may have been this discreditable incident that prompted Albert to leave Cheltenham a year or two later with his Gloucestershire-born wife and settle in Sunderland, where he remained, working as a labourer. He had three children and died in 1909, aged fifty-eight. Martha married a cordwainer, Henry Spreag, had four children and stayed in Cheltenham until she died at sixty-eight, a widow, in 1926.

In the course of his life William Barrow lived in three different houses in St James Street, Cheltenham, a long street of early 19th-century houses and cottages off the High Street.

Though now converted to shops or other commercial premises, at that time these were mostly lodging houses, both for local residents and for out-of-town visitors of the less affluent kind. In multi-occupancy, as they often were, they may have been quite crowded. Nevertheless it was a respectable area, in the lower half of the social scale between the large detached villas of the gentry and the slum alleyways at the opposite end of the High Street.

The 1861 census reveals that young William was already employed as an errand boy at the age of thirteen, as was his brother Alfred at the age of ten. Both boys would have had some schooling. Cheltenham was well endowed with infant and elementary schools, and for children who had to work during the week a basic education was on offer at the Sunday schools attached to every church.

William started working for the Post Office in January 1868. In the 1871 census he appears as a letter carrier, aged twenty-three, still living with his parents at 42 St James Street. In 1874 he married Fanny Stallard, a tailor's daughter, and in the 1881 census they were living at 8 St James Street, sharing the house with another young letter carrier and his wife. Fanny is identified as a dressmaker. They had no children. With their combined incomes they did not need to share the tenancy in later years, and in 1891 and 1901 (living at 27 St James Street) had only a few members of their extended family living with them. After William retired they moved to a cottage in Leckhampton, a quieter area on the outskirts of the town. There Fanny died in March 1904, aged sixty-two.

There is a photograph taken in the early 1900s showing a large group of staff outside Cheltenham's main post office: thirty-one men, all in office attire, and thirteen women. A clock shows that it is 8.30 am, when postmen would have been out on their rounds. Clearly it is a big busy post office (and telegraph office) and would have been no less so during William's thirty-three years there.



Figure 1: Image of staff outside Cheltenham Post Office, c.1905-1911. Courtesy Cheltenham Local History Society

Why did William retire aged only fifty-three? The reason given was just 'ill health'. One can speculate that he was prone to bronchitis (given as the cause of his death) and that his wife

Fanny, who was five years older and perhaps in failing health herself, persuaded him to retire even though his annual income was thereby reduced from £83 14s to a pension of just £46 8d. He must have been still basically healthy, and could well have found other paid work to do, though in the census returns he remained a retired postal worker. If he needed treatment for his bronchitis he could have gone to the present General Hospital, opened in 1849.

In 1905 William married again, to Louisa Martha Early, aged fifty-one. She had earlier been a domestic servant but was then living in Cheltenham with her widowed father, a retired tailor, and her unmarried sister Mary. In 1911 William and Louisa were living in Selkirk Street, a residential area near the town centre, and Mary was with them, her father having died. Still in Selkirk Street, William died on 26th January 1930, aged eighty-two. The cause of death was given as bronchitis with myocarditis. It is interesting to note that his marriage had evidently failed: he left his estate (valued at £321 5s 6d) not to Louisa but to his sister-in-law Mary, who left a similar amount when she died in 1938. Louisa died in 1937, leaving just £16 6s 8d.

Fact Sheet: William Henry (or George) Barrow

Pensioner Details
<i>Pensioner name:</i> William Henry (or George) Barrow
<i>Person ID:</i> GC1001
<i>Your name:</i> Kath Boothman
<i>U3A group:</i> South West
Part One: Birth and Family
1: When and where was your pensioner born?
William Barrow was born in Bristol in 1847. Baptised William George on 2 January 1848, though he later called himself William Henry. Perhaps had both middle names. They are certainly the same person, since William George and William Henry were both letter carriers born in Bristol in 1847 and both had a father called William who was a shoemaker.
2: Who were your pensioner's parents? Record any details you can find out about them here (e.g. occupation, religious affiliation, whether they could read or write)
<p>Father: William Barrow, born 1820 (birth record not found) in Cheltenham, Glos, son of William Barrow, labourer, and wife Ann. Baptised 25 June 1820 in parish of Longney, Glos.</p> <p>Mother: Elizabeth Barrow nee Staite, born Cheltenham Glos 1823 (birth record not found), daughter of John Staite, labourer, and wife Hannah. Baptised Aug 3rd 1823 in Cheltenham</p> <p>Marriage: William and Elizabeth were married on 20 November 1848 in Bristol. Their eldest son William had been born in 1847 and Elizabeth's maiden name appears on his baptism record.</p> <p><u>William Barrow (father)</u></p> <p>Baptised 25 June 1820 in parish of Longney, Gloucestershire, son of William Barrow, labourer, and his wife Ann.</p> <p>1841 census: William Barrow aged 21, shoemaker, was living in Keynsham Street, Cheltenham with Joyce Barrow aged 50 (perhaps an aunt?), seamstress, and Frances, Mary and Isaac Barrow aged 14,12 and 6.</p> <p>1851 census: William Barrow aged 30, cordwainer, and Elizabeth Barrow, aged 27, bonnet maker, with their son William aged 4 were living at 37 Durham Street in the St Paul's district of Portsmouth, in a house apparently shared with a sailor's wife and her two daughters.</p> <p>1861 census: William and Elizabeth were living in Cheltenham with sons William (13), Alfred (10) and Albert (7) and daughters Martha (2) and Rose (3 mths). Address is 42 St James St Cheltenham</p> <p>1871 census: William and Elizabeth were living at 42 St James St Cheltenham with son William (23) and daughter Martha Mary (12)</p> <p>1881 census: William and Elizabeth were living at 3 St James St Cheltenham with lodgers Charlie and Hannah Cripps, waiter and charwoman</p> <p>1891 census: William (recorded as widowed shoemaker) was living with his son William and daughter-in-law Fanny at 27 St James Street Cheltenham.</p>

William died in 1892 aged 72. No evidence of literacy. Baptised into the Church of England so presumably C of E.

Elizabeth Barrow nee Staite, mother

Birth record not found. Daughter of John Staite, labourer, and his wife Hannah. Baptised August 3rd 1823 in Cheltenham.

(see above for census entries)

Elizabeth died in October 1887 aged 64

No evidence of literacy. Baptised into the Church of England so presumably C of E.

3: Did your pensioner have any siblings? What were their names, and how old were they in relation to your pensioner? Use this space to record anything else you have found out about them (e.g. occupation, later life)

Brother: Albert Henry (b.1851, 4 years younger) served a week in prison in 1869 (aged 19) for indecent exposure. With his Cheltenham-born wife Jane (no marriage record found) he moved to County Durham after 1871, where he worked as a shipyard labourer and later as a railway labourer. They had 3 children, Albert, Elizabeth and Peter. Albert died in Sunderland in July 1909.

Brother: Alfred Charles (b.1854, 7 years younger) died aged 15. Alfred's burial record shows that he was buried in unconsecrated ground, suggesting that he had not been baptised. No baptism records have been found for Albert, Martha or Rose either.

Sister: Martha Mary (b.1858, 12 years younger) married James Henry Spreag, cordwainer (born in Birmingham 1849) in 1880 in Cheltenham. They had 2 sons, Walter who became a stationer's packer and William who became a grocer's assistant and later branch manager, and 2 daughters Martha and Dora. Martha Mary died aged 68 in Cheltenham 1926 as a widow living at 36 Francis Street, Cheltenham.

Sister: Rose (b1861, 14 years younger). Died aged 9 months

Part Two: Marriage and children/ boarders

1: Did your pensioner marry? What was their spouse's name, and when and where did they marry them? Use this space to record any extra details you can find out about their spouse (e.g. when/where they were born, their occupation). **Note:** *You can also use this space to record any details about people your pensioner boarded with.*

In 1874 William married Fanny Stallard, a tailor's daughter born in Colesbourne, Gloucestershire in 1842. The wedding took place in Cheltenham. She had earlier (in the 1861 census) been a house servant to a coffee-house keeper in Bermondsey whose wife came from Withington, Gloucestershire. In the 1881 census Fanny is identified as a dressmaker. They had no children. Fanny died in March 1904, aged 62 at Ellenville, Gordon Road, Cheltenham.

William married again, to Louisa Martha Early (aged 51), in 1905 in Cheltenham. She had earlier(1891) been a domestic servant, and before that (1881) a 'parlourmaid out of situation' but in 1901 she was living with her widowed father Herbert Early, a retired tailor, and her sister Mary Elizabeth, a dressmaker, at 20 Denmark Villas, Cheltenham. As this is very near St James Street where the Barrow family lived, William may well have known her before Fanny died. Herbert Early died in April 1903, and Mary apparently moved in with William and Louisa, as shown in the 1911 census.

2: Did your pensioner have any children? What were their names, and when they were born? Use this space to record any extra details you can find out about them (e.g. occupation, where they lived later in life)

No children.

Part Three: Work

1: What occupation was your pensioner recorded as doing in census years? Please make sure to state clearly which year you are referring to

1861: aged 13, William was an errand boy.
1871: aged 23, he was a Letter Carrier.
1881: aged 34, he was a Letter Carrier
1891: aged 43, he was a Postman
1901: aged 53, he was a Retired Letter Carrier
1911: aged 63, he was a 'Pension Postman'.

2: What occupations were people living with your pensioner (e.g. spouse, children, boarders) doing in the census years? Please make sure to state clearly which year you are referring to

1861 William (13) was living with his parents and 4 younger siblings at 42 St James Street, Cheltenham. William and his brother Alfred (10) were both employed as errand boys.

1871 William was still living with his parents and sister Martha Mary at 42 St James Street. Martha was a machinist.

1881 William and his wife Fanny were living at 8 St James Street with William Harding (25), letter carrier, and his wife Sarah (22).

1891 William and Fanny were living at 27 St James Street with William's father William Barrow (71), widowed shoemaker, a nephew William Spreag (9) and a niece Fanny Agg (19), schoolteacher.

1901 William and Fanny were living at 27 St James Street with nephew William Spreag (19), grocer's assistant, and two widowed aunts, (both aged 78) and a widowed boarder Elizabeth Lawrence (74) all three 'living on own means'. In 1904 when Fanny died they were living at Ellenville, Gordon Road, Leckhampton, Cheltenham. This is on higher ground on the outskirts of Cheltenham, a 'better' area than St James St.

1911 William (63) and his second wife Louisa Martha (57) were living at 1 Rye Villas, Selkirk Street, Cheltenham with Louisa's sister Mary Early (43), dressmaker. Selkirk Street is also a much more salubrious area than St James St.

William died in January 1930 aged 82. Louisa outlived him, dying in March 1937 at the age of 83.

Part Four: Anything Else/Later Life

Please use this space to record anything else you have found out about your pensioner. For example: what do we know about their life after retirement?

As a postman in late 19th century Cheltenham William Barrow would not have had a particularly hard life. It was then still a small town, the population increasing only from 42,00 to 45,00 between 1870 and 1900 (now about 115,000). He lived in the town centre, a few minutes' walk from the main post office.

The town was quite prosperous. The discovery of medicinal waters in the 18th century had led to its development as a spa, attracting many visitors especially in the summer months. In the mid-19th century, when the new fashion for sea bathing began to draw people away to the coast, its fortunes were boosted by the foundation of three large public schools: Cheltenham College (1841) The Cheltenham Ladies' College (1853) and Dean Close School (1886). Its mild healthy climate also made it a retirement destination for people whose working lives had been spent abroad in the service of the Empire, the Indian Army or the East India Company. The presence of so many well-to-do potential customers brought an influx of tradespeople and artisans of all kinds in the later years of the century, and for families such as William's – his father a shoemaker, his mother a bonnet-maker, his second father-in-law a tailor – there was a good living to be earned. William would have grown up in a reasonably stable and secure family, and, since he lived to be 82, evidently had a strong constitution.

His early retirement is something of a mystery. One can speculate that he had a tendency to bronchitis (given as the cause of his death) and that his wife Fanny, who was older than he and may have been in failing health herself, since she died in 1904, persuaded him to retire once he was eligible for a pension. He then lived for another 29 years.

St James Street, Cheltenham, where William Barrow lived in three different houses in the course of his life, is a long street of early 19th century houses and cottages off the High Street. Though now converted to shops or other commercial premises, at that time they were mostly lodging houses, both for local residents and for out-of-town visitors of the less affluent kind. In multi-occupancy, as they often were, they must have been quite crowded.

Part Five: Your Sources

Please use this space to record the sources you have used

William Barrow senior (father)

Gloucestershire C of E baptisms 1813-1913 p11

Marriage to Elizabeth Staite: England & Wales Civil Registration Marriage Index vol 11 p231

Register of Burials in the Burial Ground of Cheltenham p137 entry no 18698

Elizabeth Barrow nee Staite (mother)

Gloucestershire Church of England Baptisms page 160 entry no 1273.

Gloucestershire Church of England Burials p72 entry no.574

William Barrow

Bristol C of E Baptisms 1813-1918 p222

Marriage to Fanny Stallard: England & Wales Civil Registration Marriages 1827-1915 vol 6a p812

Marriage to Louisa Early : England & Wales Civil Registration Marriages 1827-1915 vol 6a p985

England & Wales Civil Registration Death Index vol. 6a p519

Fanny Barrow nee Stallard (first wife)

Gloucestershire Church of England Baptisms 1813-21913 (no page number)

1861 census piece 326 folio 20 p6

England & Wales Civil Registration Death Index 1837-1915 vol 6a p78

Gloucestershire C of E Burials p122

Louisa Barrow nee Early (second wife)

1881 census piece 2576 folio 84 p30

1901 census piece 2463 folio 103 p26

England & Wales Civil Registration Death Index vol.6a p430

Albert Barrow (brother)

Prison sentence Gloucestershire, England, Prison Records 1728-1914 (no identifying code)

1881 census: living in Bishopwearmouth, Co.Durham with wife & children RG11/4994

England & Wales Civil Registration Death Index vol.10a p262

Alfred Barrow (brother)

Gloucestershire C of E Burials 1813-1988 p171 entry no.3412

Martha Mary Barrow, later Spreag (sister)

Marriage to James Henry Spreag: England & Wales Civil Registration Marriages 1827-1915 vol 6a p713

1881 census piece 2569 folio 48 p10

Gloucestershire Church of England Burials 1813-1988 p25 entry 40470

Rose Barrow (sister)

Gloucestershire C of E Burials 1813-1988 p18 entry no.144

Census returns

1851: piece 1659 folio 652 p11

1861: piece 1797 folio 72 p44

1871: piece 2663 folio 48 p14

1881: piece 2569 folio 45 p3

1891: piece 2043 folio 34 p19

1901: piece 2462 folio 127 p14

1911: Reg Dist 333 piece 15551