

# Bert Sparey, Heytesbury's last stationmaster

BERT (Albert Edward) Sparey was born in Knook in 1889, possibly the youngest of at least nine children (seven boys, two girls) born to Tom Sparey, a master thatcher, and Charlotte, née Whatley. The family lived variously in Codford, Upton Lovell, Knook and Heytesbury. Bert was stationmaster at Heytesbury when the station closed in 1955, after which he and his wife May went to live in the St John's almshouses in Heytesbury. Bert died in October 1967 and is buried in an unmarked plot immediately behind Heytesbury Church. May was moved to Trowbridge and died there in 1975 at the estimated age of 89. All that is known about her is that she was born in Bodmin, Cornwall; her name was originally Mary Anne but she was always known as May.

Bert and May lived at No.2 and then No.3 Station Cottages. Living with them was Jim, whose name was actually Albert Edward Polden, born 1899. He was Bert's cousin, the illegitimate son of Charlotte Whatley's sister Ellen. He worked with Bert at the station and died of cancer in 1953. Bert and May were childless.

June Green, née Sparey, born 1942, whose grandfather Charles Thomas Sparey was one of Bert's brothers, used to spend holidays with Bert and May from c.1948-51 with her family. They first stayed in No.2, which she recalls had no gas, electricity or running water. Each evening she and Jim would fill two galvanised buckets from the water pump at the station for use in the morning. On the way back they looked for glow-worms on the triangle of grass which then fronted the cottages from the lane.

Jim, she says, was a lovely man, perhaps slightly slow witted but very quiet and gentle. Bert was ruddy cheeked and smiling and always called June "little maid." After work each day he and Jim would have a wash, get on their bikes, and make what Bert called their biggest decision of the day: whether to turn left and go to the Red Lion or right and head for the Angel when they had cycled down the lane into the village.



The house was lit with paraffin lamps, and the toilet was an earth closet in the garden. Bert kept hens in a large coop at the side of No.2 and had another flock on a bit of land on the opposite side of the tracks to the station. June recalls May up to her elbows in a bucket mixing bran with vegetable peelings and other leftovers for the hens. She thinks they sold surplus eggs in the village. A path led from the garden up to a gate next to the bridge on the Tytherington Road, and June spent many happy hours sitting on the gate daydreaming and admiring the view and wide Wiltshire skies.

She thinks No.3 did have running water (via a pump in the kitchen) and probably gas lighting was installed, but cannot recall what the toilet arrangements there were.



**Top, Bert in his Army uniform. He may have served in WWI probably in the Wiltshire Regiment (I can't read the shoulder flash—could be "H&W" something) or because of his occupation on the railways may have been a reservist.**

**Above, his wife May, who always washed her hair in rainwater. When June knew her she had her hair bobbed and it fell in beautiful natural "Marcel" waves**

**Left, Bert's cousin Jim, aka Albert Edward Polden**



***Bert, May and a visiting family member. Between Bert's feet is Dinah the dog. May is holding a kitten***

June recalls typical country suppers when they stayed with May and Bert: "We would have a cooked lunch, done on a range in the kitchen, then at supper time, or when Bert and Jim got back from the pub, the table would be laden with great slabs of cheese, ham, pork pies, hard boiled eggs, salad, pickled onions, celery, home made chutney, bread, butter—and we would eat and eat. How we slept after that I don't know.

"The meal was eaten by the light of paraffin lamps, and there was always talk around the table of local tales, some of them quite scary, or weird things that happened during the war. If I had nightmares I don't know whether it was down to these stories or the feast we had before I went to bed.

"My sister was born in 1950 and the following year when we stayed with them she was teething. After keeping the whole house awake for two nights in a

row with her crying, May suggested to my mother that she should give my sister her bedtime bottle that night. She did, and my sister slept for almost 20 hours. My mother was frantic but May just told her to let her be, she was quite all right. Eventually my sister woke up with two new teeth.

"May eventually confessed she had put "a little drop" of brandy into her bedtime bottle.

"Between Bert's feet in the picture of him, May and another family member is a black and tan terrier whose name was Dinah. Bert and May had a succession of black and tan terrier-type mongrels—and every one was called Dinah."

***June Green, nee Sparey***

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