

## **Sir James Bradford and the Almshouses by George Boyden**

*This article first appeared in the winter 1988 edition of the Helpston Chronicle.*

James Bradford was born on 13 February 1841, just in time to appear on the 1841 census alongside his parents and his brothers, William, Francis and John, and his sisters Millicent, Janez [sic] and Elizabeth. His father was the publican at the Bell Inn (now the Blue Bell) also with the trade of tailor. It was in the early months of 1841 that the Ancient Order of Foresters – Court Forester's Star – was founded in the Bell Inn.

James entered the service of the Midland Railway Co. at Helpston station in 1856, as a general clerk. His father died on 27 March 1858 and, as appeared usual at that time, the household effects were auctioned and the remaining family moved out of the village.

James joined the Great Northern Railway in 1860 at Peterborough and transferred to Retford in 1862, starting the restless changes on the promotion ladder in railway service. He moved to Hatfield, returning to Peterborough in 1865 as a Superintendent. An appointment at Doncaster in 1868 gave rise to a celebration by the Peterborough staff when a gold watch was presented to him. At the presentation, testimonials were expressed about his considerate attitude toward staff and bereaved families.

By 1873 he was a Superintendent at Portsmouth Station for the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway Co. His responsibilities including the travel arrangements to and from the Isle of Wight for Her Imperial Majesty, The Empress of Austria. Her appreciation was marked by presenting James Bradford with a set of gold, diamond and pearl shirt studs and solitaires. This was the peak of James Bradford's railway career.

He retired as an employee of the L B & S C R in 1876, in which year he married and became director of the Wainfleet, Frisby and Skegness Railways. Later, as Chairman, he negotiated the sale of the company to the Great Northern.

His interests, following taking up residence in Brighton turned to catering for the L B & S C R as well as being an hotelier. He was appointed a Justice of the Peace in Brighton in 1903 and other commercial interests were taken up in and around Brighton.

It was in 1907 that the Almshouses endowed by James Bradford were built in Helpston on land donated by the Fitzwilliam family. They were designed by Clayton and Black with whom there was a Bradford family connection. Mr. Dan Crowson of Helpston undertook most of the construction and Knapp's of Collyweston did the roofing. The earlier association with the Ancient Order of Foresters is reflected in one of the residential stipulations of preference being given to those who were or are members of a registered Friendly Society.

It is said that James Bradford led over the threshold each of the original occupants, who were: Mrs. Wm. Clare, aged 83; Mrs. F. Tyler, aged 79; Mrs. J. Quincy, aged 72; Mrs. Brown, aged 70; Mrs. Wheeler, aged 68 and Mr. Joseph Gess, aged 73. Mr Gess, who had been in local railway service and retired from being the gate-keeper at Lolham Crossing, was accepted in general as being the caretaker. This was not a singular gesture of charity by James Bradford as for a number of years, Miss Pearce of Helpston House had been distributing gifts in Helpston on his behalf.

Other charitable works of James Bradford were the erection of six almshouses at Haywards Heath in 1911, of a similar style to those at Helpston, and the donation of an adjoining piece of land on which the Kind Edward VII Cottage Hospital was built.

A knighthood was conferred upon him on 29 July 1914. Other honours received by Sir James were Honorary-Member Knight of the Ancient Order of Foresters and Past master of the Royal Brunswick Lodge of Freemasons.

Lady Bradford died in 1922 leaving two daughters. Sir James continued in residence at 'Oaklands, Haywards Heath until his death on 24 April 1930.

George Boyden

*My acknowledgements of appreciation of help are tended to:*

*The British Library*

*W.G. Cooper, Order Historian, Ancient Order of Foresters*

*East Sussex County Record Office*

*H.M. Franks, Helpston*

*Sussex Daily News*

*And to J.Ingram for the photograph, which was taken in 1906 and shows Dan Crowson standing in the main doorway [and appeared in the Chronicle along side this article].*

