

## James George Cann (1819-1901) : Registrar and local politician

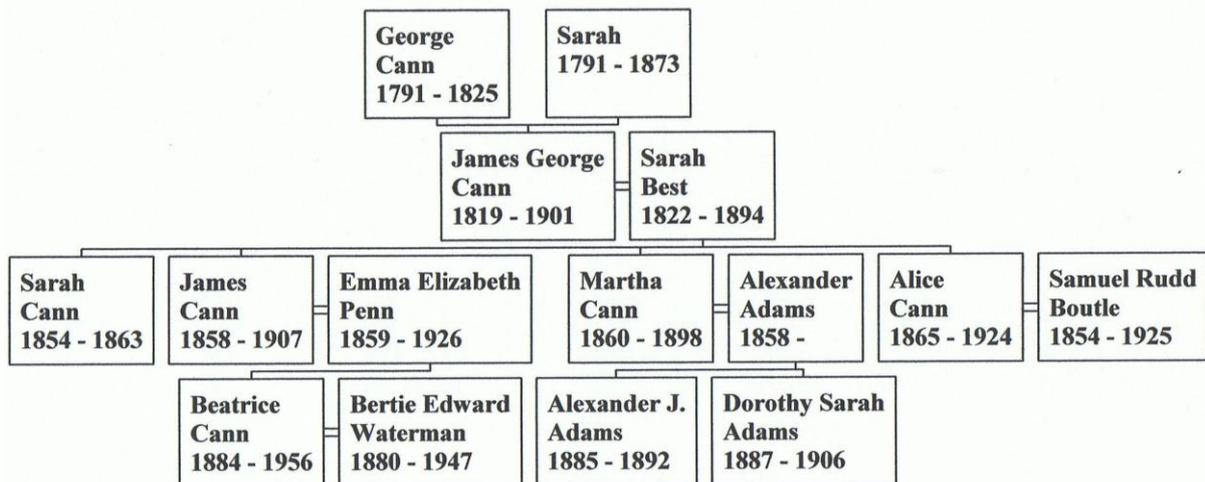
James George Cann was born in 1819 in Dartford, a son of George and Sarah Cann. They lived in Dartford from at least 1815, when their daughter Frances was born. James was baptised on March 28<sup>th</sup> 1820 at Holy Trinity Church, Dartford. Intriguingly, the baptism record gives his name as William George Cann but there is a note below saying that this is an error and that the name should have been recorded as James George Cann. It is signed by his mother Sarah and dated 1847. Quite how this error arose and why it took until 1847 to correct it, is unclear!

George Cann (the father of James) was a grocer, who died in 1825 aged 33, when James was only 6. The tithe list in 1838 shows Mrs Sarah Cann as the owner and occupier of a house and shop in Lowfield Street, Dartford. The 1841 census lists Sarah Cann, age 49, a grocer living in Lowfield Street with her daughter Frances, 25. I cannot find James in this census.

The 1838 Tithe List records that a George Cann, who lived in Overy Street, owned 21 houses and a pub in Dartford. He died in 1848 aged 81. His will is difficult to read but it refers to James Cann of Lowfield Street, Dartford, harness maker (son of Sarah Cann of Lowfield Street). George seems to have been a relation of James, possibly grandfather. It seems likely that George left James several of his properties as James was later described as a “large cottage holder”<sup>1</sup>.

The 1851 census shows Sarah Cann, a widow and annuitant age 59 living in Lowfield Street with her unmarried children Frances, a seamstress age 35 and James, a saddler master age 31. James married Sarah Best on 9 November 1852 at St Botolph, Northfleet. He was a bachelor aged 33, a saddler. She was a spinster aged 31, born in Northfleet, a daughter of George Best, a wheelwright. They went on to have four children namely Sarah (born 1854), James (born 1858), Martha (born 1860) and Alice (born 1865).

*Hourglass Tree of James George Cann*



Melville's 1858 Directory of Kent shows James George Cann as a saddler and harness maker in Lowfield Street, Dartford. In 1861 James, a saddler, was living at a shop in Lowfield Street with his wife Sarah, children Sarah, James and Martha plus a house servant. James's eldest child Sarah died in 1863 aged 8.

James was a member of the Dartford Detachment Kent Rifle Corps. At their annual dinners he would be invited to relate his stirring adventures with the corps<sup>1</sup>.

*"He would describe, with a mixture of pardonable pride and irresistible drollery, for he had a rare fund of humour, how he .... took part in a Volunteers' visit to Belgium, how they were accorded honourable reception by the Burgomeisters of cities there, were specially honoured by His Majesty the King of the Belgians, and received medals in commemoration of the occasion. With these and many other reminiscences, Mr Cann would arouse applause and "set the table in a roar," for he was a fluent speaker, although a homely one."*

Sometime between 1863 and 1871, James ceased work as a saddler. The census in 1871 records his occupation as "registrar of births and deaths, formerly saddler" and his address as 46 Spital Street, Dartford where he was living with his wife Sarah (49), children James (13), Martha (10) and Alice (6) as well as a servant. James had the same occupation and address in 1881 and 1891. His mother died in 1873 aged 72 and his children married, Martha in 1882 (to Alexander Adams), James in 1884 (to Emma Elizabeth Penn) and Alice in 1899 (to Samuel Rudd Boutle).



James George Cann<sup>1</sup>

The 1891 Kelly's Directory for Kent has the following entry "Cann James George, registrar of births & deaths & vaccination officer for Dartford sub-district & collector of creek dues, 46 Spital Street."

James was a member of the Dartford Local Board for 35 years and was its Chairman for 20 years. His obituary<sup>1</sup> says :

*"He was one of the earliest members of the old Local Board of Health (now the Urban District Council) .... and was one of the most popular members of that body and for a number of years its chairman. He not infrequently headed the poll, being regarded as a people's man, as when Dartford boasted a Ratepayer's Association he would attend its meetings , and vigorously defend his own policy , and freely criticize that of his colleagues when they differed from him on some salient question of public interest. .... He was not then a Progressive, or, if so, a very moderate and cautious one, disinclined certainly to movements of a speculative character. "*

James did not hesitate to express his opinions forcefully and consequently upset some people. He often opposed schemes that would increase Dartford's rates. A local newspaper<sup>3</sup> reported, following his retirement in 1894 that

*"In the course of his long and useful official career Mr Cann has often said unpleasant things, and has trod rather severely on the toes of many who have come into contact with him, and although these things have occasionally raised feelings of antagonism, yet his fellow townsmen have always recognised that he hits straight from the shoulder, and has been impelled by a sense of duty, or a desire to benefit the public, in what he has said and done. "*

Sarah Cann, the wife of James, died unexpectedly in 1894 aged 72. She had given orders for a coachman to call for her and was fully dressed lying dead on the floor, when found by a servant. Martha Adams, daughter of James, died in 1898 aged 37. She had been "in failing health for some considerable time"<sup>4</sup>.

The 1901 census shows James G Cann, widower aged 82, late registrar of births and deaths living at 46 Spital Street with his son James aged 43, his daughter in law Emma aged 42 and two servants. James died on October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1901 in Dartford aged 82 and was buried in East Hill Cemetery in the same grave as his daughter Sarah and wife. I have located the plot<sup>5</sup> but it has no stonework on it. The value of James's estate was £16,138 2s 6d, which is equivalent to about £7 million now<sup>6</sup>. Probate was granted to his son James Cann, pharmaceutical chemist and Henry Ernest Bailey, solicitor.

46 Spital Street is now the address of the Dartford Conservative Club. From looking at old maps, it seems that the building on this site is the one that James lived in, although the front of it may have been altered.

James had three grandchildren. Beatrice Cann (1884-1956), daughter of his son James, married Bertie Edward Waterman in 1908 and they had four children. The other two grandchildren died young, without offspring. They were Alexander James Lindsay Adams

(1885-92) who died aged 7 and Dorothy Sarah Adams (1887-1906), who died aged 18, both children of Martha Adams nee Cann.

A family tree of James George Cann may be found in the “cann42” database on RootsWeb’s WorldConnect Project website.

Philip Taylor © 2011

[PhilT42LQS@Yahoo.co.uk](mailto:PhilT42LQS@Yahoo.co.uk)

#### References

- 1 *Death of Mr J. G. Cann*, West Kent Advertiser, October 26<sup>th</sup> 1901.
- 2 *Yesterday’s Town: Dartford*, Geoff Porteus, 1981
- 3 *Mr J. G. Cann’s Retirement*, Dartford Chronicle & District Times, January 8 1895
- 4 *Death and funeral of Mrs Adams*, West Kent Advertiser, 25 June 1898.
- 5 Plot 2476, SE Quarter
- 6 Calculated with respect to average earnings using the website “Measuring Worth”  
[www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/](http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/)