

Shared Paths, Shared Stories

We know of another family from the Gypsy and Traveller community who stayed at a stopping place in the Crumbles area of Eastbourne.

Mary Ann Beeney was born in Biddenden, Kent in 1855 and her parents, Absalom and Priscilla later had four more children – Ruth, Celia, Samuel and George - whilst travelling around the Kent and Sussex area. In 1871, the Beeney family had stopped in their caravan in Tunbridge Wells with the Wheeler Family and another Beeney family, likely Mary's Uncle.

Mary Anne Beeney married Joseph Rowland at St Mary's Church, Eastbourne in 1879. He was a hawker, as was his father Thomas and Mary Ann's father Absalom.

Joseph was baptised in Kent in 1857, though the 1871 census records his place of birth as Eastbourne and living with his mother Margaret in a show cart in Caterham, Surrey.

Mary Ann and Joseph Rowland had been back to the Tunbridge Wells area where their daughter Margaret was born in 1881 before coming to Eastbourne again to stop in their caravan at the Crumbles, Eastbourne.

They are both recorded as licenced hawkers. Also with them is their adopted daughter Mathilda who is listed as being born in the East Indies. Their son Absalom was born in Eastbourne in 1883 and by 1891, they were stopping at Poors Common, Christchurch, Hampshire alongside other families from the Gypsy and Traveller communities including the Barnes family, the Greenwood family and the Willett family. Ten years later, we find the Rowland family in Brighton at a stopping place near the Bear Inn on Lewes Road with many other families. By 1911, Mary Ann and Joseph are living in Nursery Road, Tunbridge Wells next to their daughter Margaret, who by this time had married Christopher Brazil and had three children. They stayed in Nursery Road until they died, Mary Ann in 1923 aged 67 and Joseph in 1929, aged 73.



Map of Eastbourne showing Crumbles area around 1860

Mary Ann Rowland's obituary was published in the Kent & Sussex Courier on Friday 27 April 1923

"A familiar and much respected figure of High Brooms passed away on Friday... She came from a well known Welsh travelling family... The family travelled the country as showmen, horse and furniture dealers, and 46 years ago, settled down in caravans in Nursery Road. At that time, the High Brooms district was largely forest and woodland. For 46 years, the occupants of the caravans pursued their own peculiar calling, maintaining the happiest relations with all in High Brooms, and Mrs Rowland earned esteem and respect by her friendly disposition, unflinching kindness and habitual generosity... [Mary Ann] had toured all parts of England and had visited Wales, the Isle of Wight and Ireland. She is said to have had many adventurous experiences, was twice run over by a caravan, once by a motor lorry and once by a motor car. She was a distant relative of Joseph Beckett, the boxer, and looked after him when he was a lad. In a Kentish hop garden, she once found a little girl, Mathilda Carter, whom she brought up as one of her own family."



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