

- [Editor's Message](#)
- [Forum](#)
- [Photos](#)
- [Research Services](#)
- [Contact Us](#)



Caroline Jane Cousins (1837-1927)

[Jul 27th, 2011](#)

by [Dorset Ancestors](#).

One of the Last Knocker-Uppers!

The idea of an Alarm Clock has been around for a long time but it was not until 1908 that a reasonably reliable device came onto the market at a price a working man could afford. This brought with it the demise of the Knockers-Uppers, a profession that finally died out in Dorset soon after the end of World War I.

This is the story of Caroline Jane Cousins, a lady who, in her twilight years managed to make a living as a Knocker-Upper in Poole; more specifically from the Quay to the Gas Works which took in Lagland Street, Thames Street, Stand Street, Taylor's Buildings, Emerson Road and the High Street. For three pennies a week she would come around and wake up workers from their slumbers by tapping on the bedroom window. For most of her clients this would mean a really early morning call as work in most of the factories in Poole started at 6am.

In winter she would start her rounds well before daybreak, dressed in a black dress, white apron and shawl, all topped off with a white bonnet. She had a lantern and a long pole which she used to tap the windows with. She also had a whistle with which she could hail the police if anyone attempted to assault her.

She became known as 'Granny Cousins,' though by all accounts she was not the family woman this form of address implies, at least in her later years. Indeed, when one of her sons, Solomon, lost both his legs in an accident she took it quite philosophically and apparently showed little sign of grief when he died; neither does she appear to have had much contact with her children and grandchildren in her later years.

Recalling the days when she lived in the country was something she liked to do. Those were times when necessity meant she had to make a meal go a long way and this was her top tip: *"You put yer piece o'bacon in pot and then when he've a-cooked a bit, put in yer cabbage, then whack up yer dough enough for the family and put he in on top. Tha's Skiver Cake, that is, an' good for 'ee, too. But, don'ee drow away the water 'tis biled in. You drink that there an' twill keep away all manner o' diseases."*

She was the daughter of Benjamin and Sarah (Lovell) Bartlett and baptised at St. Mary's church, Morden, on New Year's Day 1837. Her parents were both from close-by Lytchett Matravers and they married there on the 14th of June 1820. Her mother died aged 49 and was buried on the 12th of August 1847 at St. Mary's, Morden. The census taken in 1851 records Caroline with her father, older unmarried sister Diana, and one-month-old niece Elizabeth, living at Sherford, Morden. In 1861 Caroline is lodging with Isaac and Martha Lovell at White Field, Morden; she is described as a nurse and house servant.

She married Joseph Cousins in the early months of 1863. Joseph was older than her by 34-years and after her marriage she more often than not appears in records as Jane. As far as we can tell Caroline and Joseph had four boys and two girls. In 1871 Joseph then 69 years of age and Caroline just 35 years could be found at 3, Horse Pond Cottages, East Morden, with them their children: Benjamin, Thomas and Louisa. (There are indications of another child born early in 1865. He was named Owen but we haven't been able to establish where he was in 1871 and 1881.)

Joseph Cousins died in 1880 leaving Caroline in desperate circumstances. She was forced to move into the Union Workhouse at Wareham, taking sons Thomas and Soloman and daughter Dinah Fanny with her.

By 1891 Caroline had removed herself from the workhouse and was living at Scaplins Yard, Salisbury Street, in the St. James parish of Poole. With her is her daughter Dinah and sons Solomon and Owen, who is now married to Rosena Ellen (Gallop); they married towards the end of 1887. Owen was a bricklayer's labourer.

In the years between 1891 and 1901 Caroline became detached from her children and was living at 1, West Street, St James, Poole, where she was employed as a housekeeper to a widower, James Arnold, a bricklayer. The 1911 census records her at 24 Skinner Street a boarder with William Efemy, a fisherman.

We think her time as a Knocker-Upper started around 1901 and continued until just after the end of World War I when she retired and also gave up working at the local twine factory. She was described as a strange old woman who didn't wear her heart on her sleeve and had a way of talking at great-length to no one in particular, staring straight ahead as she did so.

After her retirement she joined the Salvation Army, a cause she remained faithful to until her death in 1927. She received no old-age pension and she was looked after by the parish. Having no home of her own she showed no signs of self-pity and lived in the humble lodgings she had acquired with a friend. She had enjoyed good health for most of her life, something she put down to always drinking the water she cooked her vegetables in.

Inevitably her strength started to fail her. She was taken to the local infirmary where she died aged 89. She possessed a battered alarm clock, which had no doubt accompanied her on her morning rounds. But she deserves to be remembered not only for her unusual occupation but because of her determination to get on with life despite all the hardship it threw at her.

Footnote:

Vanessa Marshall writes: *Her daughter Fanny Dinah Cousins married Edward Martin Effemy in 1893 at St James' Church, Poole and Granny Cousins attended the marriage. They had a total of eight children, including: Mary Fanny Caroline and James Effemy in 1904. Mary's middle names were after her mother and grandmother. Unfortunately Fanny Dinah died in 1905, when Mary was only 14 months old.*

Mary and her elder sister were fostered out, but Mary knew her grandmother Granny Cousins well. Furthermore, Granny Cousins was living with a distant relative of Martin Effemy's – William Effemy (sic) in 1911. The sad thing was that Granny Cousins outlived all her children, but she knew her Effemy grandchildren.

Her granddaughter, Mary, went on to marry Robert William Frederick Bessant (whose own mother was also an Effemy and their first daughter – Mary Ann Diana Jane was born at Poole in 1932 – the Diana Jane part of her name being a tribute to her grandmother and great grandmother. Mary Bessant is my husband's mother.

(Granny Cousins was not as detached from her family in her later years, as our article suggests. Ed.)

Posted in: [Morden](#), [Poole](#), [Real Lives](#).

← [Jordan Hill Roman Temple and the nature of pagan piety](#) [William Barnes Statue](#) →

Comments are closed.

- [Subscribe to our Feed via RSS](#)

- Here to help with your family history research and to make it more than just a list of names, dates and places we will paint in words and images a backdrop to life and events in Dorset in bygone days.

• Archives

Select Month ▼

• Categories

Select Category ▼

• Photos



[More Photos](#)

• Categories

- [A Day Out](#)
- [Abbotsbury](#)
- [Affpuddle](#)
- [Alderholt](#)
- [Almer](#)
- [Anderson](#)
- [Arne](#)
- [Ashmore](#)
- [Askerswell](#)
- [Athelhampton](#)
- [Batcombe](#)
- [Beaminster](#)
- [Beer Hackett](#)
- [Bere Regis](#)
- [Bettiscombe](#)
- [Bincombe](#)
- [Biographies](#)
- [Blandford](#)
- [Bloxworth](#)
- [Book Reviews](#)
- [Bournemouth](#)
- [Bradford Peverell](#)
- [Bradpole](#)
- [Bridport](#)
- [Broadmayne](#)
- [Buckhorn Weston](#)
- [Canford Magna](#)
- [Cattistock](#)
- [Cerne Abbas](#)
- [Chalbury](#)
- [Chaldon Herring](#)
- [Charminster](#)
- [Chetnole](#)
- [Chettle](#)
- [Chickerwell](#)
- [Chilcombe](#)
- [Christchurch](#)
- [Compton Abbas](#)
- [Corfe Castle](#)
- [Cranborne](#)
- [Dorchester](#)
- [Durweston](#)
- [East Chelborough](#)
- [Evershot](#)
- [Eype](#)
- [Fifehead Neville](#)
- [Fleet](#)
- [Fontmell Magna](#)
- [Fordington](#)
- [Frome St. Quintin](#)
- [Frome Vauchurch](#)
- [General](#)
- [Gillingham](#)
- [Glanvilles Wootton](#)
- [Godmanstone](#)

- [Hazelbury Bryan](#)
- [Hilfield](#)
- [Hilton](#)
- [Hinton Martell](#)
- [Horton](#)
- [Iwerne Courtney](#)
- [Iwerne Minster](#)
- [Iwerne Stepleton](#)
- [Kimmeridge](#)
- [Kingston Lacey](#)
- [Kington Magna](#)
- [Langton Herring](#)
- [Langton Matravers](#)
- [Leigh](#)
- [Lillington](#)
- [Little Bredy](#)
- [Litton Cheney](#)
- [Loders](#)
- [Long Bredy](#)
- [Lulworth – East](#)
- [Lulworth – West](#)
- [Lyme Regis](#)
- [Lytchett Matravers](#)
- [Maiden Newton](#)
- [Mappowder](#)
- [Marnhull](#)
- [Melbury Bubb](#)
- [Melbury Osmond](#)
- [Melcombe Regis](#)
- [Milborne St. Andrew with Milborne Stileham](#)
- [Milton Abbas](#)
- [Minterne Magna](#)
- [Monkton Wyld](#)
- [Morden](#)
- [Moreton](#)
- [Nether Cerne](#)
- [Nether Compton](#)
- [North Poorton](#)
- [Osmington](#)
- [Owermoigne](#)
- [Piddletrenthide](#)
- [Pilsdon](#)
- [Pimperne](#)
- [Poole](#)
- [Portesham](#)
- [Portland](#)
- [Powerstock](#)
- [Poxwell](#)
- [Puddletown](#)
- [Puncknowle](#)
- [Purbeck](#)
- [Rampisham](#)
- [Real Lives](#)
- [Ryme Intrinseca](#)
- [Shaftesbury](#)
- [Shaftesbury – Holy Trinity](#)
- [Shapwick](#)
- [Sherborne](#)
- [Shillingstone](#)
- [Shroton](#)
- [Sixpenny Handley](#)
- [Spetisbury](#)
- [Stalbridge](#)
- [Stanton St. Gabriel](#)
- [Steeple](#)
- [Stinsford](#)

- [Stock Gaylard](#)
- [Stockwood](#)
- [Stoke Wake](#)
- [Stour Provost](#)
- [Stour Row](#)
- [Stourpaine](#)
- [Studland](#)
- [Sturminster Newton](#)
- [Sutton Poyntz](#)
- [Swanage](#)
- [Swyre](#)
- [Sydling St. Nicholas](#)
- [Symondsbury](#)
- [Tarrant Gunville](#)
- [Tarrant Hinton](#)
- [Tarrant Keyneston](#)
- [Tarrant Launceston](#)
- [Tarrant Monkton](#)
- [Tarrant Rawston](#)
- [Tarrant Rushton](#)
- [Thorncombe](#)
- [Thornford](#)
- [Tinkleton](#)
- [Todber](#)
- [Toller Fratrum](#)
- [Tolpuddle](#)
- [Trent](#)
- [Tyneham](#)
- [Uncategorized](#)
- [Up Cerne](#)
- [Wambrook](#)
- [Wareham](#)
- [Warmwell](#)
- [West Lulworth](#)
- [West Parley](#)
- [West Stafford](#)
- [Weymouth](#)
- [Whitchurch Canonicorum](#)
- [Whitcombe](#)
- [Wimborne](#)
- [Wimborne St. Giles](#)
- [Winfrith Newburgh](#)
- [Winterborne Anderson \(See Anderson\)](#)
- [Winterborne Stickland](#)
- [Winterborne Tomson](#)
- [Winterborne Whitchurch](#)
- [Winterbourne Houghton](#)
- [Winterbourne Steepleton](#)
- [Woodford](#)
- [Woodlands](#)
- [Woodsford](#)
- [Wool](#)
- [Worth Matravers](#)
- [Wraxall](#)
- [Wyke](#)
- [Wynford Eagle](#)
- [Yetminster](#)

• Archives

- [March 2016](#)
- [February 2016](#)
- [July 2015](#)
- [December 2014](#)
- [November 2014](#)

- [October 2014](#)
- [September 2014](#)
- [August 2014](#)
- [July 2014](#)
- [June 2014](#)
- [May 2014](#)
- [April 2014](#)
- [March 2014](#)
- [February 2014](#)
- [January 2014](#)
- [December 2013](#)
- [November 2013](#)
- [October 2013](#)
- [September 2013](#)
- [August 2013](#)
- [July 2013](#)
- [June 2013](#)
- [May 2013](#)
- [April 2013](#)
- [March 2013](#)
- [February 2013](#)
- [January 2013](#)
- [December 2012](#)
- [November 2012](#)
- [October 2012](#)
- [September 2012](#)
- [August 2012](#)
- [July 2012](#)
- [June 2012](#)
- [May 2012](#)
- [April 2012](#)
- [March 2012](#)
- [February 2012](#)
- [January 2012](#)
- [December 2011](#)
- [November 2011](#)
- [October 2011](#)
- [September 2011](#)
- [August 2011](#)
- [July 2011](#)
- [June 2011](#)
- [May 2011](#)
- [April 2011](#)
- [March 2011](#)
- [February 2011](#)
- [January 2011](#)
- [December 2010](#)
- [November 2010](#)
- [October 2010](#)
- [September 2010](#)
- [August 2010](#)
- [July 2010](#)
- [June 2010](#)
- [May 2010](#)
- [April 2010](#)
- [March 2010](#)
- [February 2010](#)
- [January 2010](#)
- [December 2009](#)

• Calendar

June 2026

M T W T F S S

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

M T W T F S S

8 9 10 11 12 13 14

15 16 17 18 19 20 21

22 23 24 25 26 27 28

29 30

[« Mar](#)

• **Pages**

- [Editor's Message](#)
- [Forum](#)
- [Photos](#)
- [Research Services](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

• **Meta**

- [Log in](#)
- [Entries feed](#)
- [Comments feed](#)
- [WordPress.org](#)

© 2026 **Dorset Ancestors** | Powered by [WordPress](#)

A [WordPress theme](#) by **Ravi Varma**