

The Bellem Family - Interesting Facts



This is another name that does not have a coat of arms so I have used the crest from the town of Bellem in Northern Belgium, where I believe they came from originally.

Mattathias Bellem's (born about 1735) place of birth, and, therefore, that of his father Elijah, is not known. I have a theory that they may have come from the town of Bellem, which is in northern Belgium near the Dutch border, or Mattathias may have been born somewhere in Devon, but by 1776 he was in Dartmouth (Susser archives). He was a Hayim (leader of the Jewish community) of Dartmouth, and may have been a founder of a Synagogue there (although no trace or records of this exist).

Harriet Bellem (one of Hannah Bellem's sisters) who was born in about 1809 was born deaf and dumb. She remained a spinster all her life. After her mother died, she was supported by the Plymouth Jewish Community (see the entry for the 1871 census) by being given 2/6d per week from the donations given to the Plymouth Synagogue, she was also supposed to have been an excellent seamstress.

The 'black sheep' of this family was Isaac Bellem (1814 – 1900). He married Betsy Marshall in 1839 but is not with her in any census. Together they had at least 4 children, 2 of which died young. I couldn't find him in 1851 but in 1861 he is living with Elizabeth Ann Truan, who says she is his wife, and 1 of his sons, but I can't find a marriage entry for them but if I had it would have been bigamous as Betsy was still alive, living in Devon with her mother and their other son. I have also found a record from 1873 which shows that Isaac spent a month in prison for wounding another man.

Article from the Plymouth Herald.

My name is Rachel Bellem, daughter of Abraham. I was born here in Plymouth in 1783, where I lived with my family until my marriage to Aaron Ben Matthias Bellem, who was born in Dartmouth in the county of Devon in 1780.

Aaron's grandparents were immigrants from mainland Europe back in the early 1700s, and settled in Dartmouth and Plymouth, where his grandfather, Elijah Ben Bellem carried on his trade as a lens grinder, a craft he learned during his youth when he had been an apprentice to an old diamond merchant in Amsterdam.

Elijah lost his living when his employer died from lung disease caused by the many years of breathing in the glass dust from the lenses he ground. With no job Elijah decided to emigrate with his young wife to find a better life with opportunities in a new country...England. My husband Aaron followed in the family tradition, and became a lens grinder and optician in Dartmouth.

It was a good living, and although we were not rich, neither were we poor. We were blessed with seven children: Rachael born in 1803, followed by Hannah; Harriet; Esther; Jacob; Isaac and finally Abraham who was born in 1822, he was a good and dutiful son, and a delight, having been born to us late in life.

There were many joys in our life, and a few sorrows which we tried to accept with grace and dignity. Our daughter Harriet was deaf and dumb, but a loving and good child, she became a seamstress for the Plymouth congregation, and later for the naval barracks in the Royal William Yard. After I passed away in my 70th year, Harriet was supported by the Hebrew congregation, she was given 2/6d a week from donations until her death in 1890 at the age of 80.

Abraham became a dyer, and worked hard to help support us especially after his father's health failed due to inhaling glass dust. My dear husband Aaron died on 23rd October, 1833 at the age of 53, a life cut short by the conditions of his work but I was lucky to have loving children around me, Jacob, was a good son, and made a living as a general dealer.

Esther and Hannah made good marriages and moved away with their husbands, Esther to Chatham in Kent, and Hannah to Mile End in London. Rachael never married, but stayed close to us as she was not a strong girl, and rarely went out other than to the synagogue or to visit sick members of the congregation. She was a great support to me and helped with her younger siblings.

Isaac was a difficult boy, given to waywardness and free thought. Despite all our efforts to keep him in the fold, he married a young woman not of our faith, and we lost him forever. I loved each of my children and it was a great sadness in my life to lose him, as I know there were children, my grandchildren, and I was forbidden ever to see them.

In 1899 Minnie Bellem (1878 – 1961) and Edwin John Bellem (1875 – N/K) married Henry Joseph Marsh and Ada Harriet Marsh, respectively. Minnie and Edwin were siblings was this true of Henry and Ada and, therefore, another case of siblings marrying siblings?

In 1924 John Charles Plant Bellem (1904 – 1981) married Amelia Harriet Beckwith (1896 – 1981). Two of their children have incorrect entries on the GRO indexes; Ronald C Bellem born in 1929 in Poplar is shown with a Mother's Maiden Name of Cockwith and Anthony Bellem born in 1932 in Stepney is shown with a Mother's Maiden Name of Beckworth.

In the 1881 census Emma Bellem (1863 – 1936) is shown as living in a "cripples' home" in Marylebone, London. Why was she so far away from her family and what was wrong with her? Then in the 1891 census she is back in Bristol but now in a workhouse as a widow but this is untrue but is probably simply because she has a child and doesn't want to be classed as a fallen woman! By 1901 she has 2 children, presumably both illegitimate, who both got married and had families of their own.

In the 1911 census Charles Bellem (1863 – 1945) and his wife Mary Ann Bellem (nee Plant, 1872 – 1924) say they had been married for 13 years but I couldn't find a marriage record for them. Eventually, I found the record shown below which shows that they didn't actually marry until 1913. Why

2nd Quarter 1913 District Newcastle T. Vol. 10b Page 238
Charles Bellem married Mary A Plant