

Farnhill and Kildwick's first OAPs

The old age pension is just over a century old.

The Old Age Pensions Act was introduced into parliament by David Lloyd George on August 1st 1908, and aimed to remove the final remnants of the detested Poor Law. The Act came into force on January 1st 1909, and was paid to the half a million men and women who were eligible.

The 1908 Act allowed for the payment of between 1s (5p) and 5s (25p) per week to men and women aged 70 and over – 7s 6d (37.5p) to married couples.

To put this in context, in 1909 only 1 in 200 people reached the age of 70, and a typical pensioner might be expected to spend (per week):

- Rent (one room) – 2 shillings
- Coal – 6d
- Bread (4 loaves) – 6d
- Tea ($\frac{1}{4}$ lb) – 6d
- Milk (quart) – 3d
- Potatoes (7 lb) – 3d
- Cheese ($\frac{1}{4}$ lb) – 2d
- Sugar ($\frac{1}{2}$ lb) – 1d
- Meat ($\frac{1}{2}$ lb, cheap cuts) – 3d

For someone in receipt of the full 5s pension, this would leave just 6d over for other expenses.

But even this came with strings attached. The pension was only payable to people:

- Whose annual income was less than £31 10s.
- Who held British nationality and had lived in the country permanently since 1878.
- Who were not in receipt of any charitable donations or detained in a workhouse or mental health asylum.

There was also a “character test”, and people could be refused a pension if they had ever:

- Served a prison term or been convicted under the Inebriates Act.
- Refused work when able.

The first local OAPs

So who were the first local OAPs: the first people in Kildwick and Farnhill to collect an old-age pension ?

The table below lists the names of all people who were resident in Kildwick and Farnhill, and aged 62 or more at the time of the 1901 census, and who were still living on January 1st 1909.

Name	Age on Jan 1 st 1909	Died	Notes
John Brigg	74	1916	Although of an appropriate age, it is unlikely that John Brigg, father of J. J. Brigg the MP for Keighley, would have been eligible for an old-age pension - on grounds of income.
William Brown	71	Uncertain	Possibly died in 1913 or 1916
Thomas Brown	90	1915	
Margaret Craven	73	1909	
Robert Green	73	1910	
Joseph Greenwood	74	1914	
Elizabeth Greenwood	77	1909	
Ann Hargreaves	74	1909	
Robert Hargreaves	73	1916	
John Holmes	74	1918	
William Birch Holmes	81	1916	
Mary A Kitson	74	1912	
Benjamin Smith	78	Uncertain	Possibly died in 1912
John Pollard Smith	73	Unknown	Date of death not known – but this name definitely appears on the 1911 Kildwick census
John Stirk	84	1912	
Mary A Sunderland	70	1922	
Mary Sunderland	76	1916	
Sarah H Sutcliffe	79	1912	
Jane Walmsley	88	1915	

Name	Age on Jan 1 st 1909	Died	Notes
Ellen Watson	77	1924	
William Wilson	70	Uncertain	Died in either 1910 or 1916
Jane Wray	74	1909	
Mary Ann Wray	77	1912	

“Smile for the camera ...”

The August 12th 1912 issue of Keighley News included this photograph and an article entitled “Kildwick and Farnhill Veterans”.



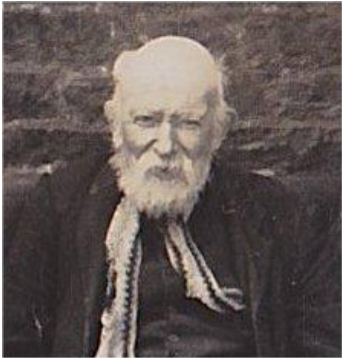







Note: The original photograph has the text “Old Age Pensioners – Kildwick Coronation Seat, 1912” at the bottom (blanched-out in this copy).

The newspaper article begins:

Probably few villages can boast such a group of hale and hearty old residents as gathers from Kildwick and Farnhill at the Old Smithy Corner, opposite Kildwick Church, on fine afternoons. The seat on which the old men sit was provided by money left after the Coronation celebrations, and here the “local Parliament”, a picture of which we present on this page, holds its meetings. The ages of the men range from 75 to 92, and totalling exactly 500, they average over 83 years each.

The article then goes on to name the men, as follows (left to right):

	<p>The gentleman on the far-left is named as John Holmes, aged 78 at the time of the Keighley News article.</p> <p>In his earlier life John Holmes helped with the work that adjusted the course of the river Aire around Kildwick.</p>
	<p>Thomas Brown, 93.</p> <p>When he died, on January 16th 1915, the Keighley News reported that he had lived in six reigns: George III, George IV, William IV, Victoria, Edward VII, and George V.</p>
	<p>William Stansfield, 75.</p>
	<p>Joseph Greenwood, 78.</p> <p>Retired a few years prior to the date of the photograph after 40 years working as a carter for the Midland Railway company.</p>

	<p>William Birch Holmes, 84.</p> <p>In the late 19th and early 20th century, Kildwick Post Office was operated by members of the Holmes family. For most of that period, Birch Holmes was the village postman.</p> <p>Below is a photograph of Birch Holmes, in his postman's uniform, taken shortly before his death in 1916.</p> 
	<p>On the far-right is John Smith, aged 92, known as "Old Dixie".</p> <p>Dixie appears in one of our Anecdotes, as he organised his own wake.</p> 

Further information

For further information on UK old-age pensions, see <http://www.pension100.co.uk/historyofpensions/timeline.htm>. Full details of the 1908 Act, see <http://www.archive.org/stream/oldagepensionsac00cassrich#page/n0/mode/2up>

Acknowledgement

The Farnhill and Kildwick Local History Group would like to thank Michael Walmsley for the loan of the original of the OAP's photograph, and Helen Waller for help with the identifications.

What next ?

Can you provide any more information on Kildwick and Farnhill's first OAPs ? If so, please email the History Group at history@farnhill.co.uk.

Alternatively, why not join us at one of our monthly meetings ? See the website for details.