



Painting by Daniel Kelly

On the evening of 31st July 1838, the Baptist Chapel in Falmouth was open for worship. The word **FREEDOM** was written and placed over the front entrance. The congregation arrived an hour before midnight to pray. There was silence and at midnight William stood up and pointed to the clock and exclaimed, **“The hour is at hand, the monster is dying.” There was a deadly silence whilst the clock struck twelve and William exclaimed, “The monster is dead, the negro is free.”**

William was ill throughout his time in Jamaica due to yellow fever and the climate, with temperatures of 40 degrees centigrade and Mary nearly died three times. She gave birth to eight children but only two girls survived. They went on to marry Jamaicans and their ancestors live in Jamaica. Mary survived William by twenty-five years. With her two daughters, Catherine and Ann, they chose to remain and teach in Kettering Jamaica. Mary felt at home in Jamaica, regarding those she lived with in the free village of Kettering as her fellow countrymen. She and William believed that they had been sent to the island not to turn the African Jamaicans into Caribbean versions of Englishmen but to assist them in creating a new Jamaica, one where Black and White had equal opportunities. William bought land to enable the free slaves to have their own property. He named the town Kettering after his birthplace.



Memorial to William Knibb in Falmouth, Jamaica.

“This monument was erected by the emancipated slaves to whose enfranchisement and elevation his indefatigable exertions so largely contributed; by his fellow labourers who admired and loved him, and deeply deplore his early removal; and by friends of various creeds and parties, as an expression of their esteem for one whose praise as a man, philanthropist, and a Christian minister, is in all churches, and who, being dead, yet speaketh.”

In 1988 on the 150th anniversary of slavery in the British colonies William was awarded one of Jamaica’s highest civil honours, the Order of Merit.

Compiled by M. I. Ozdemir 2025

WILLIAM KNIBB



www.ketteringcivicsociety.net

1803: William & twin, Ann Knibb born in Kettering England on the 7th September.
 1815: William was apprentice printer to J.G. Fuller.
 1816: William moved with the business to Bristol.
 1822: William was baptised at Berrymeads Baptist Church on the 7th March.
 1822: Thomas, William's brother, went to Jamaica to become a missionary.
 1823: Thomas died.
 1824: 5th October, Knibb married Mary Watkins.
 1824: 5th November, William & Mary set sail for Jamaica, they boarded a West India merchant ship named Ocean. Great storms delayed their journey.
 1825: In the middle of February they finally arrived at Kingston where he was to teach.
 1825: Their first children were born, a twin boy and girl who only lived for ten days.
 1828: William went to Savanna-la-Mar to teach.
 1830: In Falmouth, several hundred church people voted for William taking on the position of Minister *'the whole church, to an individual, simultaneously rose and held up both hands, and then burst into tears'*.
 1830: William stood up for **Samuel Swiney**, a deacon of the Baptist church who was convicted of *'preaching and teaching at improper hours in the evening to slaves and free persons'*. He was sentenced to two weeks hard labour in the workhouse, and twenty lashes. William spoke out in Samuel's defence and gained respect from the slaves.
1831-1832: The Baptist War or Sam Sharpe Rebellion
 William and his fellow ministers tried to prevent the rebellion but they were accused of inciting it. They were found innocent. Sam Sharpe was executed at Montego Bay on 30th May, pleading the innocence of the missionaries, and declaring that that if he had listened to their instructions, he should never have come to that awful end.



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William preaching in Kettering England

1832: William spoke at meetings in London and all over England informing of the horrors of slavery and sympathy was shown all over the country.
 The Christian Church was aroused by the events that happened in Jamaica and the descriptions given by William, and the public feeling for emancipation grew in strength with petitions to the House of Lords from all parts of the country from all classes.
 William travelled to St Andrews, Dundee and Newcastle, Cork and Dublin telling of the horrors of slavery.
 1842: William's visit to England coincided with the Jubilee meetings of the Baptist Missionary Society.
 At the annual meeting of the Baptist Society on 21st June, William was there to represent Jamaica. He was told not to meddle in politics but he disobeyed this.



1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in Exeter Hall.
 There is a copy of this painting in the Council offices in Bowling Green Road, Kettering, England.

He said, *"Whatever may be the consequence, I will speak. At the risk of my connection with the Society and all I hold dear, I will avow this; and if the friends of missions will not hear me, I will turn and tell it to my God; nor will I desist till this greatest of curses-slavery-is removed, and, 'Glory to God in the highest, 'is inscribed on the British flag!'"*

1843: William visits England for the final time and writes to Mary: *"I think that from 8,000-10,000 persons were present at the different meetings. On the Wednesday evening, I had to give three addresses-at the Baptist Chapel, at the Independent, and at the tent, (in Kettering) which held more than 4,000 persons, so that I was about two and a half hours speaking. Public breakfast, 500 strong or more, next morning, collections £1,300. I went the same day to Birmingham, and on the following held a meeting in the Town Hall. Mr James proposed a vote of confidence in my brethren, and I was presented with a silver medal, which I hope to show you by the 1st August."*



Kettering Urban Council 1938
 Coat of Arms

The broken chains represent the abolition of slavery and the wavy lines, the Baptist Missionary Society which was founded in Kettering, England.