

James (Jim) Alexander Williams

■ Biography

Place of birth: Jamaica

Date of arrival in the UK: 1960

James (Jim) Williams was brought up in Jamaica. He was one of four boys and lived on a farm with his parents. He went to a good but strict school where he remembered that the nuns used branches from the trees to punish the children!



Portrait of Jim Williams 1990
Photo courtesy of Bristol Record Office

Jim was originally a shoemaker in Jamaica, and also kept goats and cows, and he liked singing and social occasions. He was nicknamed Dandy after a famous character. He had Sickle Cell trait and was often unwell with asthma as a child. He became interested in politics when he read a book called *The Sun Is My Undoing* which made him aware of the unfairness in society.

He then met and married Lynette Campbell and they had their children, Dawn (Letna), Raymond and Carol. In 1960, Jim came to England intending to study agriculture, but did painting and decorating instead. Later, Lynette joined him and after having their son, Winston, their other children joined them. Many people coming to the UK at this time had left their children behind with relatives so they treated all children as precious, as everyone missed their own.

Once in Bristol, Jim got a job with Bristol Omnibus Company after the successful campaign to allow Black people to work for them.

Jim acted as a community worker in his local area, as people came to him for help. People remember that if he didn't know something he would seek the answer and the door to his house was always open and people were always staying.

At first, his daughter remembers that people from the Caribbean didn't go to English social clubs, as they weren't made to feel welcome. Instead they had house parties or played dominos. They later introduced dominoes into local pubs in their area, and Jim was a founder member of the Western Star Domino Club and captain of the domino team. During the day, it was often the case that the women shopped and the men played dominos in their spare time. In the evenings there would be a big party when trophies were awarded.

Jim was a member of the Labour Party and he became involved in the Trade Union movement. He was asked to stand as a councillor for Ashley ward and was elected as a Labour Party councillor in May 1987.

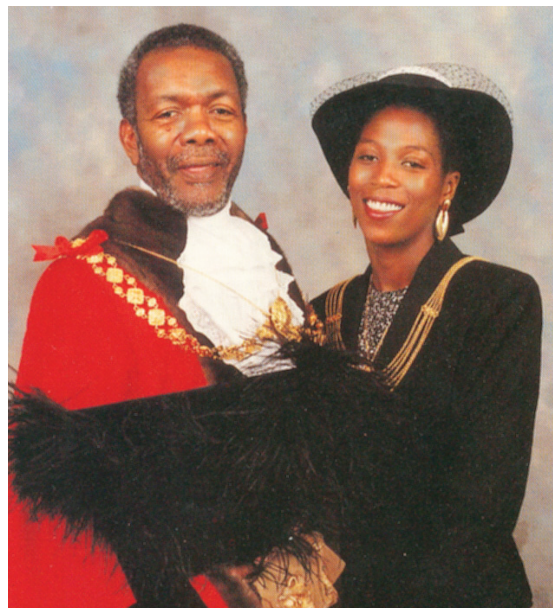
He was a member of a number of Bristol City Council committees and his community involvement included being a key member of the Bristol Council for Racial Equality and St. Paul's Community Council. He was also a Justice of the Peace. While he was a councillor, some people asked him why he still lived in a flat on City Road, St. Paul's and this offended him because he wanted to get on in life, but not remove himself from his own people.

In the 1970s, Jim and his wife Lynette divorced but they remained friends. He also had another daughter Paula with a new partner.

When he was made Bristol's first Black Lord Mayor in 1990, it was decided that his daughter Carol would be Lady Mayoress. There were some mixed feelings in the city when a Black mayor was appointed. His daughter Carol remembers being in the Lord Mayor's car with Jim when customers outside a pub started using their fingers as guns to shoot at them. There was another occasion at the Mansion House when a woman avoided shaking their hands as they greeted her. He wasn't upset by this but took it in his stride.

The year after he became Lord Mayor, the Labour Party did not choose him to stand as a councillor. He missed doing this job but kept busy running his pub, St. Nicholas House, in St. Paul's until his health became worse. He died a couple of years later in March 2002 of a stroke.

Jim was a man who never liked to see intelligence wasted. He seldom complained and loved to enjoy himself.



Jim when he was Lord Mayor
with his daughter Carol
Photo courtesy of Bristol Record Office

Carol believes his message would be:

“Don't let negative comments about your creed or colour weigh you down.”

James (Jim) Alexander Williams

■ Teachers' Background Notes

(Based on an interview with his daughter Carol Williams)

James (Jim) Williams was brought up in Jamaica and was much loved by his mother, Priscilla Grizzle, who had some Indian ancestry. One of four boys, he lived on a farm with his parents. He went to a good but strict school where he remembered that the nuns used branches from the trees to punish the children. His daughter Carol thinks that it may have been because of this experience he never hit his children.

Jim was a shoemaker in Jamaica and liked singing and social occasions. He also kept goats and cows. He was nicknamed Dandy after a famous character. He had Sickle Cell trait and was often unwell with asthma as a child. As a young man he read a historical novel called *The Sun Is My Undoing* which sparked his interest in politics, as it made him aware of the inequalities in society.

He met and married Lynette Campbell and they had Dawn (Letna), Raymond and Carol. In 1960 Jim came to England intending to study agriculture but did painting and decorating instead. Once established, his wife Lynette joined him and after having their son, Winston, their other children joined them. Many people coming to the UK at this time had left their children behind with relatives so all children were precious, as everyone missed their own.

Once in Bristol, Jim met Paul Stephenson and Henry Owen and got a job with Bristol Omnibus Company after the successful campaign to allow Black people to work for the company. He lived in St. Paul's before the M32 divided Easton and St. Paul's and separated that community.

Jim became an unofficial community worker in the area as people came to him for help. People remember that if he didn't know something he would seek the answer. The door to his house was always open and people were always staying. Later he would miss the days of solidarity at Albany Road, St. Paul's and felt that as the status of the Caribbean community rose they became more distant from each other.

At first, his daughter remembers that people from the Caribbean didn't go to English social venues, as they weren't made welcome. Their social life centred around house parties or dominoes played in their homes.

They also introduced dominoes into local pubs in their area. Jim was a founder member of the Western Star Domino Club and captain of the domino team. People met up for domino competitions. During the day, it was often the case that the women shopped and the men played dominoes in their spare time. In the evenings there would be a big party when trophies were awarded. Finally the club got its own premises and became a social club, where there were events for young and old, and it was usual for Jim to be asked to be the Master of Ceremonies at weddings and social occasions.

Jim was a member of the Labour Party and he became involved in the Trade Union movement. He worked as the Financial Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, Bristol. He was involved in setting up the Malcolm X Centre and getting the funding to run it. Because of these activities he was asked to stand as a councillor for the Ashley ward and was elected as a Labour Party member in May 1987.

He was a member of a number of Council Committees including the Employment and Community Development Committee, Land and General Purposes Committee and Chair of the Race Equality Committee. His community involvement included being a member of the Executive for the Bristol Council for Racial Equality and a committee member of St. Paul's Community Council. He was also a Justice of the Peace. When he was a councillor, some people asked him why he still lived in a flat on City Road, St. Paul's. This offended him because he wanted to progress but not remove himself from his own people.

In the 1970s Jim and his wife Lynette divorced but they remained friends. He claimed that politics broke up his marriage, as he was always travelling round to different conferences. He also had a daughter Paula with a new partner.

When he was made Bristol's first Black Lord Mayor in 1990, it was decided that his daughter Carol would be Lady Mayoress. Carol was proud of her father but felt that he was manipulated and given the position to stop him fighting to change things, like the creation of more jobs for Black people.

There were some mixed feelings when a Black mayor was appointed. His daughter Carol remembers being in the Lord Mayor's car with Jim when customers outside a pub started using their fingers as guns to shoot at them. There was another occasion at the Mansion House when a woman avoided shaking their hands as they greeted her. He wasn't fazed by this but took it lightly. If people took offence at his speeches he would say, "Oops I said the right thing in the wrong place".

The year after he became Lord Mayor the Labour Party deselected him as their councillor. He missed doing this job but kept busy running his pub, St. Nicholas House, in St. Paul's until his health became worse. When his ex-wife, Lynette, was dying, he wept on the way to see her in hospital and kept saying, "Look how far we've come and you have to leave me".

He died a couple of years later in March 2002 of a stroke. Jim was a man who never liked to see intelligence wasted. He seldom complained and loved to enjoy himself.

Carol believes his message would be: **"Don't let negative comments about your creed or colour weigh you down"**.