



Frank Sweetland, photographer. c1907

The Bedford photographer took some of the best early photographs of Bletsoe and many other villages, pictured with his wife Kate and daughter Irene, outside what appears to be a frosted-glass window at the rear of his studio, probably in Ford End Road, Bedford. Frank, whose real name was Frank Sweetland Cocks, was the son of a prosperous Peterborough seedsman. Frank worked for a time as an engineer's clerk before taking up photography and meeting Kate, who was employed by a haberdasher supplying photographers' props. They subsequently married in 1897. After taking up photography, Frank moved around the country; starting in Peterborough he had subsequently set up in business at 28 Freckleton Street, Lytham, Lancs, then Grimsby, Lincs, before changing his name to Frank Sweetland and settling in Bedford. Even then he seems to have been somewhat restless having, during the ten years that he worked in Bedford, moved premises successively in 18 Ford End Road, 84 Hurst Grove, 79 Harpur Street, and finally 81 Tavistock Street. Frank was clearly a very skilled and active photographer. As well as undertaking studio photography, he cycled around villages as far afield as Cranfield, Lavendon, Knotting, Eaton Socon, and Blunham with his large and heavy plate camera strapped to his bicycle. Most of his expertly photographed topographical pictures were taken using a 5½" x 3½" postcard-size glass-plate camera, and most of the prints were taken directly from those plates without enlargement or further treatment, which makes their quality all the more remarkable. He seems to have ceased business in Bedford in 1916. Aged 45, Frank and his family subsequently moved to Bournemouth, reverted to the surname 'Cocks', and took up residence at 3 Oak Road. At the time of his death he was moderately wealthy, having acquired several seafront properties and opened a grocery store. His wealth was reputedly the result of patents he held on a design of camera shutter and possibly a bicycle freewheel. He died in a road accident in Bournemouth in June 1936 aged 65 (Bournemouth Registry District. volume 2b, page 964). Kate Bertha died in 1954 aged 81. Their daughter, Bertha, died 11th January 1978 in Bournemouth, never having married.

EB 65 (*Frank Sweetland*)