

Major John Hignell. (Porter) 1868 - 1910.

Major John's family story begins in the Cotswolds. His Father was a Miller. His christian name, Major, Probably denotes that he is the first born son. In some regions it was still customary for the first born son to inherit from the father (Right of Primogeniture). The term major was often applied. generally as a suffix, sometimes as a middle name and very occasionally as a first name. Other sons were Minor.



The mill stream at Castlett in 2010 (map ref 51.92655, -1.8691)

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When Major J was young the family moved a number times as his father sought work at other mills. The rural milling trade was in decline. Industrial millers using the railways for distribution, could supply bakers in outlying areas efficiently with low cost, quality flour. Our research into another porter Oliver Hawkins found him lodging at Tewksbury in 1911. His landlord was a 'Flour Porter'. A siding ran from the Station to the River Avon, a distance over over a mile. It serviced Healings Borough Mill. a large steam powered mill built 1865 and typical of the new industrial mills of the time.

No surprise then that Major J turned his back on the milling trade and went to work on the railways aged 16.



By Healing's Mill, Tewkesbury. 1998 (Edited)

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1853 Major J's parents John Thomas Hignell and Keziah Smith married at Winchcombe (Q1 6a 551).

1861 Census, Castlett Mill, Guiting Power, finds John Thomas Hignell age 29, Miller, Keziah Hignell, wife, age 28, Caroline age 4 and Hannah age 1. Also at the mill are Hannah Robbins, 15, Servant & John Spence, 57, Grinder.

<https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=17.5&lat=51.92673&lon=-1.86934&layers=168&b=1>

1863 Kellys Directory shows John Hignell, Miller, at Castlett Mill.

1868 October 1 Major John was born, at Guiting Power, Gloucestershire.

1871 Census suggests the family then occupied a house close to the centre of the Guiting Power. The Census record falls somewhere between the Bell Inn and the Police Station. John and Keziah then had 5 children- Caroline age 15, Hannah age 12, Julia age 10, Major J age 2 and Ethel Bertha age 1.

1881 census finds the family residing at Ullington, by Pebworth - about 2 miles north of Honeybourne. At the house are John Thomas Hignell age 49, Miller, Keziah age 48, Major J age 12 and Ethel B age 11.

<https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=16.4&lat=52.12365&lon=-1.84082&layers=168&b=1>

1884 March. Major John began work, age 16, on the railway as a Lad Porter at Honeybourne station. Wages 8 shillings a week.

1885 Sept, Major J Transferred to Kidderminster as a Ticket collector. Wages 11 /- a week.

1887 April Major J Transferred to Ironbridge Station as a porter. wages 15 /- a week.

1889 July Transferred to Kidderminster as a Porter. Wages 18/- a week.

1890 October Major John was married to Martha Jarratt in Stourbridge.

The 1891 census finds Major and Martha living at 11 Findon Street Kidderminster.

<https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=16.9&lat=52.38856&lon=-2.24366&layers=168&b=1>

1901 census finds Major J and Martha at 19 Yew Tree Road Kidderminster with 4 children, Daisy age 8, Elsie age 6, Hilda age 4 and John age 2. (YewTree Road is opposite Kidderminster station).

1902 December. Major John is promoted to Foreman Porter at Kidderminster station. Wages 25/- a week.

Major John Hignell died on 9 July 1910 at Kidderminster Station, Worcestershire, at the age of 41.

He was knocked down by a passing train as he was crossing the rails.

1910 Probate records show that Major John left an estate valued at £417.15s to his wife Martha.



Old station entrance at Kidderminster. Built 1863, demolished 1968.
By Ben Brooksbank, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=25381405> (Edited)

Today a modern (2020) glass fronted building stands roughly on the site of the older station buildings and serves the Birmingham to Worcester (via Kidderminster) line. Nearby, on the former goods sidings area is the SVR Station (built 1984) which forms a terminus of the Severn Valley Railway, a preserved Heritage Railway which runs 16 miles north to Bridgnorth, Shropshire.

Newspaper reports:

Birmingham Daily Gazette - Monday 11 July 1910

KIDDERMINSTER 'TRAGEDY.

MAN KILLED AT THE RAILWAY STATION.

John Major Hignell, the foreman porter at Kidderminster Railway Station, was killed by an incoming train at the passenger station on Saturday afternoon in the presence of large number of passengers, who, were on the platforms.

The express train from Birmingham, to South Wales and the through train from London to Wolverhampton are timed to arrive at Kidderminster Station practically at the same time.

On Saturday afternoon the South Wales express was about two minutes late, and as it was entering the station Hignell hurried from the parcels office and started to cross the line to reach the up platform so as to control the traffic. He did not look up the line or he would have seen that the London train was close upon him. As he leaped from the platform on to the metals he was caught by the engine and his body was hurled against the incoming train from Birmingham. death was instantaneous.

Hignell, who was 41 years of age, has been in the service of the Great Western railway Company at Kidderminster for twenty five years. He was a most courteous and obliging official

Birmingham Daily Gazette - Tuesday 12 July 1910

PORTERS' DANGEROUS CONDITIONS OF WORK.

Mr Hebbert held an inquest at Kidderminster last night on Major John Hignell, of Lea Street, Kidderminster, a foreman Porter at Kidderminster railway station, who was killed by a train at the station on Saturday afternoon.

William John Bond, a porter, said that the train from Birmingham and the through train from London reached the station on the opposite set of metals exactly at the same moment. Hignell made the attempt to cross the line to attend to the train from Birmingham. As he leapt he made an awful scream and was knocked down by the buffer of the London train and hurled against the Birmingham train, being evidently killed on the spot. it was customary for the porters to cross the metals to serve all the trains from Birmingham going in the direction of Worcester, and if there was a rule to prohibit the practice it could not be observed, for he regarded the station as being under-staffed. He believed that about 130 trains and motor trains entered and left the station each day, and at times the traffic was very heavy. Replying to Inspector Turk, who represented the Railway Company, the witness admitted that about 4.30, when the accident happened, would be the quietest time for traffic during the day.

Inspector Darke, of the Kidderminster railway station, questioned as to the strength of the staff, and the number of times porters would have to cross and re-cross the metals, admitted that at times there was much pressure on the staff, and that each porter might have to cross and re-cross the metals scores of times each day.

The Foreman of the jury: would there be 500 crossings a day?

Inspector Darke: I should think not.

The Coroner said there would be at least one thousand crossings during the day.

The Coroner, in summing up, said it was admitted that everything had to be carried across the line. It would undoubtedly be a good thing if some other system could be adopted, as at Stourbridge and other stations, where a lift was in use for the luggage. He feared that if other provision were made for the Porters they would still cross the metals to meet the trains.

The jury, in returning a verdict of "Accidental Death", added: "We consider the present system of frequent and continuous crossing the metals by the officials at the railway station is highly dangerous".

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What Became of Major John's parents and siblings:

John Thomas & Keziah: shortly after 1881 it is likely they moved and lived a few years in Lancashire. 2 of the daughters married in that county in 1884/5.

1891 Census finds John and Keziah residing at Mill House, Childswickham, Gloucestershire.

<https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=17.4&lat=52.04467&lon=-1.89295&layers=168&b=1>

John Thomas Hignell (Miller of Childswickham) died 1896 March 27th.

Probate records show he left £148 11s 6d to his widow

Keziah continued living in Childswickham. The 1901 Census finds her still in New Street, age 69.

Also in the house is a boarder Samuel Keyte age 50, general labourer.

The 1911 Census finds Keziah residing alone at Childswickham.

Keziah passed away at Evesham in March 1914 age 81.

Caroline: 1881 Sept 14. Caroline married William Bentley (Miller of Clough End) at the parish church of St Peter at Haslingden, Lancashire.

1901 Census finds Caroline, age 42 living at 28/30 Vale St, Bacup. William Bentley, 50, is now a grocer. There are 4 children Annie 17, (Cotton Miller), Keziah 14, Louisa 12 and John W, age 8.

1911 Census finds Caroline and William Bentley running a boarding house at 18 Topping Street Blackpool. Son John W, age 18, is working as a confectioner.

1938 Jan 1, Caroline died in Blackpool. Probate records show she left £635 19s split between her two surviving daughters Keziah and Louisa.

Hannah The 1881 Census finds her living at 50 Talbot Street Southport, Lancs. and working as a servant. 1885 June 2nd she was married at the parish church of St Peter in Haslingden, Lancashire to Thomas Barlow, age 21, a Coachman.

The 1891 Census finds the family in Wilmslow Road Handforth, Cheshire with 2 children, George age 2 and Lionel age 8 months.

Thomas appears in the 1901 census, age 35, but with a new wife Margaret age 48. There are now 6 children George age 12, Lionel, 10, Harry 9, Ivy 7, Gladys 5 Hannah 4. It seems likely Hannah Hignell-Barlow passed away prior to 1901. There is the death recorded of a Hannah Hignell, age 36, Gloucestershire In 1896 (Cirencester Q2 6a 245).

Julia the 1881 Census finds her age 29 living in Grimsby at 11 Freshney St. married to Henry Lakin 33, Railway Shunter. With 3 children Helen 9, Olive 5 & John Henry 8 months.

1901 Census at the same address with 2 additional children Kate & William both age 5 months.

Probate records show Julia passed away 1905 November 24th age 45 leaving £141 to her husband Henry Lakin (Engine Driver).

She is buried in Scartho Rd cemetery. Henry was interred in the same plot in 1948, he died age 90.

Ethel Bertha The 1891 Census finds her age 23, in Honeybourne as a servant to William Dyke, farmer. She was married in 1894 to William Jackson in Stockport Cheshire.

She passed away in stockport in 1895. (Q4 8a 86)

What became of Major John's Wife and Children:-

Martha: 1911 census shows Martha still residing at the family home - 74 Lea Street Kidderminster with 5 of her children Daisy age 18, Elsie age 16, John age 12, Leonard age 6, Cyril age 6 & Phyllis age 2.

1911 Census for the Railway Servants Orphanage, Ashbourne Rd, Derby shows that among the 266 pupils (all 15 or under, 170 Boys & 96 girls) Were Lionel Major Hignell age 9 & Valentine David Hignell age 9.

1944 Martha Jarrett-Hignell passed away at Kidderminster (Q3 6c 67).

Daisy: Married 1911 to Albert Pritchard. 1912 a daughter Phyllis was born. 1912 the family emigrate to Saskatchewan, Canada. 1913 as son Arthur is born. 1918 A daughter Melva is born. Daisy died 24 June 1970 in Vancouver BC.

Elsie: Married March 1918 in Kidderminster to Harry Smith. March 15 1919 a daughter Cynthia was born in Worcester. Harry passed away in 1958. Elsie died at Broadheath, Worcs. September 5 1981 age 86.

Hilda: Went to Canada in December 1919 and resided with her sister Daisy in Vancouver.

She married an English immigrant, Jack Levey. They moved to Sacramento in 1922. She became a US citizen. It is believed she had at least one child with Jack.

Hilda Died 13 March 1965 in Santa Clara, California.

John: He was enlisted into the army in 1914. He served as a driver and was demobilised in December 1918. He joined other family members in Canada. There is no information on any marriage or children.

He died November 2 1983 in Vancouver.

Lionel Major: The 1911 census shows him at the Railway Servants Orphanage, Derby. He and his brother Valentine lived there till they were 16. Both names appear in Derby Telegraph reports as orphanage prize winners between 1913 and 1916.

In 1934 he married Elsie Griffiths of Fenton, at Madeley Staffs. They possibly had 4 children, including Joan born 1936, Major John in 1937 and Pauline in 1944.

1935 & 39 Telephone directory shows a Major Hignell at the Garage, Mare & Colt, Stanklyn Lane, Kidderminster - Phone No Kidderminster 896.

The 1939 Register Shows Lionel, a garage proprietor living at 61 Stanklyn Lane Kidderminster with Elsie, son Major J, and daughter Joan.

Lionel had been living in Hartlebury when he passed away. probate records show he left a tidy sum for the time. He died in Bromsgrove, January 20 1969 age 67.

Valentine: Born June 22 1902 in Kidderminster.

The 1911 census shows him at the Railway Servants Orphanage, Derby.

1928 September he married Prudence May Crisp in Kidderminster. No record has been found of any children. Probate records show that Valentine and Prudence had been living in Kidderminster at the time of their deaths. Valentine passed away March 31 1990 and Prudence on November 9 1990.

Cyril Leonard: Twin to Leonard C, Born July 1904 in Kidderminster.

1933 Married in Kidderminster to Daisy Ellen Woster. There is no trace of any children.

The 1939 register shows them Living at San Jose, 149 New Road, Bewdley. Cyril is a Railway Clerk. Probate records show Cyril was still at the same address at his death, December 17th 1967.

Daisy passed away in 1995 in Nottingham.

Leonard Cyril: Twin to Cyril L, Born July 1904 in Kidderminster. Married September 1933 To Kathleen Monica Grealy in Kidderminster. There is an indication they had one daughter.

The 1939 register Shows Leonard and Kathleen living at 54 Aggborough Crescent Kidderminster. Leonard 36, is a Railway Goods Clerk. Kathleen 30 is a housewife.

Kathleen Passed away in Kidderminster in 1969. Leonard passed away in Worcester in March 1972.

Phyllis Doreen born October 1908 in Kidderminster.

September 1938 she married Marcus L Mitchell in Kidderminster.

The 1939 register shows them living at 91 Marlpool Lane Kidderminster

Also in the house is Martha Hignell age 75.

Phyllis died in 1952 at Bromsgrove. Marcus died March 1991 in Kidderminster, age 80.