

Hannah Johnson

née Halliday, Ward

(b. 1815 – d. 1881)

Marie-Anne Hintze

Hannah Ward, a widow, who gave her age as 51, married Thomas Johnson, a labourer aged 70 in Ripon Cathedral on 15 December 1868 (1). They both signed the register with their mark. She gave her place of residence as Mickley, Thomas resided at North Stainley and the bride and groom's fathers are named in the register as Peter Johnson, shoemaker and James Holliday, butcher.

Both parties had been married before: Thomas, baptised in Ripon Cathedral in 1791 (2), had married Mary Atkinson of Sawley in Ripon Cathedral on 24 November 1817 (3). Their first child, Ann, was born the following year at Mickley but the family obviously moved to North Stainley shortly thereafter for her five siblings were born there. Mary Johnson died in 1868 and Thomas married Hannah Ward the same year. In the North Stainley census for 1871, Thomas is listed as head of the household, an agricultural labourer, aged 74, and his wife Hannah, is stated to be 60 years old and classed as a labourer's wife (4). At some point, he left North Stainley and died in the Ripon Workhouse (5). It is not known whether Hannah moved to the workhouse at the same time, but she was there at the time of the 1881 census, and her occupation is stated to be 'former charwoman' (6). She died later that year on 31 August. Her burial took place at Ripon Cathedral on 2 September 1881 (7).

Hannah Johnson was born Hannah Halliday and was baptised as an Anglican on 30 April 1815, in the parish of Hartwith in Nidderdale (8). She was the daughter of James and Elizabeth Halliday. Her father James died in Mickley in 1831 aged 61, and his widow Elizabeth remained in Mickley (9). On 26 October 1836, Hannah Halliday married Michael Ward at Fewston in the parish of Kirkby Malzeard (10). Michael had been baptised there on 18 July 1813, the son of Thomas Ward, labourer and Mary Cockson (11). In 1841, both were living at Mickley with Thomas Ward, a widower and flax reeler, aged 65, and his daughters Ann (aged 40) a threader and Mary Ann, aged 20, a spinner. All the members of the household, except for Hannah, were engaged in the manufacture of linen at Mickley Mill, with the exception of Hannah's husband Michael who was a mechanic (12).

In 1841, three of Hannah Halliday's siblings, George, Ann and Elizabeth lived with their mother, the two girls having found employment at Mickley Mill as flax spinners (13). In 1851, Elizabeth and her daughter Ann who was single and still employed as a spinner lived together and supplemented their income by taking in 5 lodgers, four were power linen weavers and one was a mechanic (14). The 1861 census tells us that Elizabeth was now 77, living alone, an almswoman, formerly a seamstress (15). She may have died before Hannah remarried.

The censuses for Mickley from 1841 to 1861 illustrate how a small, mostly agricultural hamlet near Ripon was affected by the presence of the mill by significantly increasing the population and providing opportunities for employment, notably for women. Mickley Mill which had opened in the 1820s as a linen mill, was also used to make machinery for the spinning of flax, therefore employed a number of mechanics. In 1841 the total population of the village was some 380, 108 of which were employed at the mill, 47 men and 57 women. However, by 1851, the population had dropped to 346, the mill employed 36 men, and 50 women including a number of Irish immigrants fleeing the potato famine and also 7 mechanics, but Michael Ward was no longer amongst them. By 1861, the mill had ceased to operate, and the population of the village had fallen to 185.

Newspaper reports of the time give a clearer picture of the reasons why Hannah and Michael would have left their community and family to seek employment elsewhere.

Mickley Mill had started life as a paper mill in the late 18th century but was sold on the death of the owner in 1821 and subsequently converted to a flax mill. However, the flax-spinning industry was subject to periodic expansion and recessions in response to outside political and economic factors, wages were low and security of employment was unknown. Many mills, especially in outlying rural areas, were very vulnerable to outside pressures. In 1841-42, there was a severe depression in the linen industry, due to a slump in trade, the competition of cotton and higher tariff on exports to Europe (16). In October 1841 the mill at Mickley was severely damaged by floods on the river Ure (17). The *York Herald* reported on the case of Elizabeth Wood, a poor woman from Mickley, applying for parish relief for she and her children were in great distress: her husband, a mechanic, had lost his job at the mill and gone off in search of other work (18).

It would appear that the search for work led Hannah and Michael to Leeds. Micheal had found employment as a mechanic in Leeds by 1851, and in 1861 Hannah and Michael are to be found in the parish of St Saviour in Leeds where Michael was employed as a toolmaker (19,20). However, he died there a few years later at the age of 58 on 22 February 1868 (21). If Hannah returned to Mickley on becoming a widow, she would have found the village very different from when she left it: the Mill had closed permanently after a second period of operation from 1845 to 1855, and the population had halved and consisted essentially of agricultural labourers, very young children and the elderly. An article in the *Knaresborough Post*, dated 27 October 1883, reporting on a tour of Nidderdale, Coverdale and Wensleydale highlighted the devastating impact of the closure of the mill on the rural community:

“From Hackfall we trudged to Mickley, a mill and village well-nigh deserted. We hurriedly leave such a scene of decay and pass on to Kirkby Malzeard” (22).

The opportunities for Hannah after the loss of her husband would have been limited: it may be that work as a charwoman was the one means open to support herself aside from marriage to the recently widowed Thomas Johnson. But even this new path was to lead both of them eventually to end their days in the workhouse at Ripon. Hannah Johnson’s death was included in the death announcements in *the Knaresborough Post*, dated 10 September 1881 (23):

“Hannah Johnson, aged 72, late of North Stainley, died at the Union Workhouse, 31 August 1881.”

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