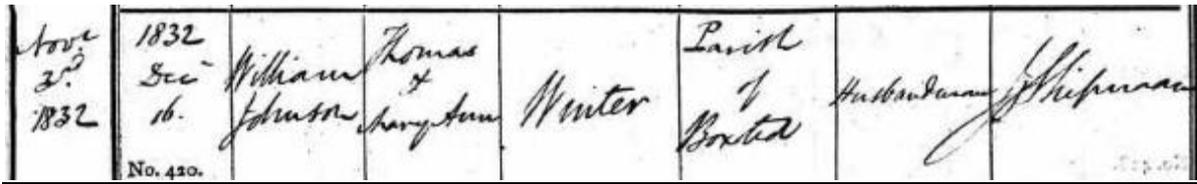


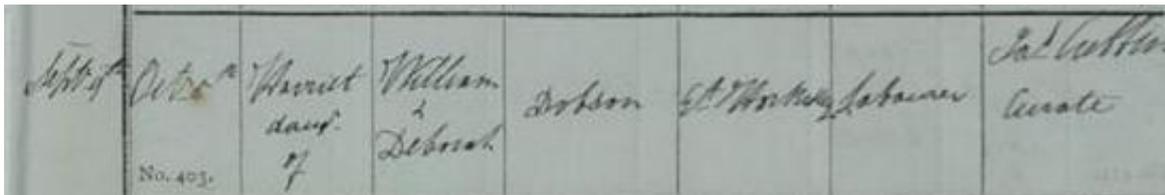
## William Johnson Minter and Harriet Dobson



**Baptismal entry for the birth of William Johnson Minter**

Born in Boxted, Essex, on November 3 1832 William Johnson Minter was the eldest child of agricultural labourer Thomas Minter and Mary Ann Surry; his father died when he was aged just twelve, and his mother subsequently remarried his father's cousin James Minter in nearby Colchester on May 28th 1848 and is to be found living in the same household in Boxted three years later. His three surviving siblings George, Mary and Henry were soon to be complemented by stepbrothers John and James and a stepsister, Roseanna. At least four contemporary documents – the 1901 and 1911 censuses and an 1886 report in the *Ipswich Chronicle* newspaper together with his sons Mark and Albert's marriage certificate enumerate him not as William but "Johnson Minter" and, as a consequence, it appears almost certainly this is the name he went by in life, in all probability to distinguish himself from the plentiful William Minters in the locality. Unsurprisingly, in common with his father given the limited opportunities of advancement he himself became an agricultural labourer in Boxted at an early age.

He was married Harriett Dobson of Great Horkesley, the daughter of William Dobson and Deborah Wilkins on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1853; she was already seven months pregnant with Sarah Ann Minter the couple's first child being born in Great Horkesley on 24 December 1853 just ten weeks after the couple's marriage. Sarah was baptised here in March of the following year, with the parish register stating the parents were still resident here.



**Baptism entry for Harriet Dobson**

Born on September 9 1834, Harriet was still a teenager when she was married to Johnson and doubtless her falling pregnant before her marriage would have brought shame to the family yet her siblings conspired to bring shame upon themselves throughout the course of her life despite the efforts of her father. In 1849, an event occurred at which it is likely Harriet was witness to when her father became involved in a dispute with his next door neighbours, the Stow family. Over a period of time relations between William Dobson and the Stows steadily deteriorated, which was exacerbated when they started having late night drinking parties and Dobson's 18 year old son John began socialising with Elija the Stow's 17 year old son, a convicted felon who had already spent three months in solitary confinement for stealing a spade. This relationship was a matter of deep concern to William Dobson and matters came to a head one evening after he locked his son out of the family home when he returned from one of the Stow's parties at around 1 am one Sunday morning accusing him of keeping bad company. When Elijah turned up at the family residence matters escalated when Dobson accused him of stealing one of his son's rabbits and called him a "damned liar". When he opened his front door and walked into the street to confront Stow he was assaulted with a broom on both his head and arm, leading to being forced to take time off work to recuperate under the attention of a doctor, his head being bandaged during the hearing. Stow was sent back to prison by the magistrates.

Chapel House	William J Minter	Head	Male	44	Ag Lab	Essex Boxted
	Harriet Minter	Wife	Female	45	Ag Lab Wife	Essex Gt Horkesley
	Charles Minter	Son	Male	14	Ag Lab	Essex Boxted
	John Minter	Son	Male	14	Essex Ag Lab	Essex Boxted
	Albert Minter	Son	Male	12	Ag Lab	Essex Boxted
	Walter Minter	Son	Male	11	Ag Lab	Essex Boxted
	Mark Minter	Son	Male	9	Ag Lab	Essex Boxted
	Margaret Minter	Daughter	Female	7.5	Scholar	Essex Boxted
	Harriet Minter	Daughter	Female	9	Scholar	Essex Boxted
	Frederick Minter	Son	Male	7	Scholar	Essex Boxted
	Mary Ann Minter	Daughter	Female	5	Scholar	Essex Boxted

**1881 census entry for the Minter family**

Both Harriet's brothers John and William Dobson became chronic alcoholics. John jumped off a bridge in Colchester whilst intoxicated in 1863 and followed Stow in his misdemeanours, being convicted of three separate indictments for theft in 1868 on the same day. William ended his life aged just 39 in his local hostelry, the Yew Tree public house, Great Horkesley in 1876. Shortly after entering the premises "evidently the worse for drink" he fell from his bench into a kneeling position and was left until closing time by his companions who left him, assuming he was merely drunk when, finally, upon attempting to rouse him, life was found to be extinct; the inquest into his death showed he died of heart disease accelerated by drink.

Back in Boxted, two days after Sarah Ann Minter's birth Johnson Minter's grandfather Edward died, leaving him the sum of £10 in his will, which perhaps aided him in the setting up of a home of his own for his new family in Boxted. The size of this couple's offspring over the ensuing years was nothing short of prodigious in today's terms with thirteen in all being born over a 23 year period,

**COLCHESTER CASTLE, SATURDAY, FEB. 10.**  
 Before T. L'Estrange Ewen, (chairman), with J. Bawtree, Esq., and Rev. J. R. Smythies.

**ASSAULT AT GREAT HORKESLEY.—Elijah Stowe** was complained against by William Dobson, for an assault committed on him, on Sunday last, at Great Horkesley.—The complainant (whose head was extensively bandaged, and whose appearance was that of a person suffering from serious illness,) said that on Sunday morning, at about one o'clock, his son knocked at the door of his house for admission; and he himself got out of bed and spoke to his son out of the window, refusing, in the first instance, to let him in, as he had heard sounds of revelry in Stowe's father's house, and believed that his son had been there drinking, in bad company. He afterwards went down in his shirt to let his son in; and the defendant, who had been blackguarding him when he was at the window upstairs, struck him violently with a stick, inflicting a wound on his head, which bled profusely, and afterwards struck his arm, which was raised to defend his head from further attack. Had been under a doctor's hands ever since, and unable to go to work. On being cross-examined by Mr. Abell (for the defendant) complainant made some additions to the above statement. He allowed that he had not been on friendly terms with the defendant for a length of time, and that before he was struck by the defendant, he told the latter that he had stolen his (complainant's) son's rabbits, and called him a thief, but he thought he did not call him a "d—d swink," nor did the defendant come back to his house from the road on his invitation; he denied having put himself in a fighting attitude, or striking the defendant in the least.—Mr. Abell called as a witness Sarah

including a set of twins - Margaret and Mark - born in 1867. However, putting this into context, whilst still a very large brood, parents producing this many children at this time would still not be regarded as exceptional in itself by their contemporaries: what remains every bit as astonishing as the size of this family is the fact only one died in childhood when typically the infant mortality rate at this time nationally was around one in three. Apart from Walter, Thomas and Charles who died in their twenties the rest of this brood lived into the twentieth century and the descendants today of this couple run into their hundreds with all nine of his surviving children marrying.

A further sense of incredulity over the family life of William Johnson Minter must be to ask how he managed for so long to eke a living supporting this huge family with the wages of the agricultural labourer being so desperately low and as a consequence some sense of achievement for this man must be merited although once his children were old enough they became self sufficient - either in domestic service, the army or agricultural labouring respectively and were able to contribute to the household expenditure before marrying and raising families of their own. With no compulsory schooling enforced prior to the 1870 Education Act children took to the fields from a very early age, although it appears William's children received at least a basic education given the evidence shows they were able to read and write. Prior to this education was in the hands of local charities and "dame schools" with mixed results. A little knowledge in early Victorian society was still seen, as the adage goes, as a dangerous thing. As such around a third of the population at this time were illiterate, perhaps higher in particular in rural areas where literacy was seen as inessential to their chosen professions.

*Newspaper report detailing the assault on Harriet's father by Elijah Stowe*

**SWINE FEVER.**  
 Supt. Daunt reported that four pigs belonging to William Woodgate, of Great Horkesley, had been affected with swine fever, and had been killed and buried. They were valued at £3.5.—Five pigs, the property of Mr. Johnson Minter, of Boxted, had also been affected with swine fever and destroyed. Valued at 12s. each.

*Swine fever outbreak as recorded in the Essex standard, 16 Oct 1886*

sufficient.

When the agricultural depression hit rural Essex a number of William's children migrated away from the place of their birth with Mark, Frederick, Sarah, Albert, Margaret and Mary Ann all moving to London and they were joined there for a time by George whilst Nathan began a successful career with the police based in Romford; by 1911 none of the surviving family members were living in their home village with the exception of William Johnson Minter junior. However, both Johnson and Harriet remained in Boxted and it was only several years after Harriet's death in 1898 and the subsequent marriage and relocation of their youngest daughter Mary Ann six years later did William finally relocate himself, possibly for a time in Dedham; he then resided with his daughter Margaret and son in law Charles Lay Elmer in Lambeth where, despite his advanced age found employment as a mason's labourer. Given both his sons Frederick and Albert worked as monumental masons, the latter founding his own family business in nearby Norwood, it is a possibility Johnson assisted him.

On October 11, 1886 the *Ipswich Chronicle* recorded an outbreak of swine fever on both Johnson's property and in nearby Great Horkesley: five of his pigs had to be put down to avoid the disease spreading; it serves as a timely reminder that today's agricultural epidemics blighted the lives of our forebears in common with our own. That he owned pigs also goes some way to arguing he was at least partly self

## BOXTED'S OLDEST COUPLE ?



MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM MINTER, aged 80 and 77, are one of the oldest couples in Boxted. They were born in Boxted and have lived there all their lives. Mr. Minter has been champion ploughman of South East Essex. They have 12 children and 22 grandchildren.

**William Johnson Minter jnr with wife Esther Elmer, 1938**

William Johnson Minter died at the age of eighty on 19 June 1913 in Lambeth; he was survived by eight children who had produced at least fifty grandchildren, and lived to see the births of several great grandchildren, amongst whom was my grandmother.

As for Johnson's children, as has already been noted, Albert set up business as a monumental mason or, to use today's modern parlance, made and inscribed headstones in cemeteries. His chosen career saw him move to Norwood, South London,

where he set up his own business where he prospered over the following years leading to the expansion of his business to the extent he was able to leave £6216 in his will, passing his business on to son Walter Johnson Minter after his death in 1940. Described as a man "of quiet disposition and few words" in his obituary Albert - or Alf as he was known to his family - had carved "many of the finer headstones in Norwood Cemetery".



**Albert Minter**

William Johnson Minter junior, in common with his father, produced a huge brood of 13 children and continued living in Boxted as an agricultural labourer all his life, ultimately becoming champion ploughman of South East Essex. He and his wife are pictured in a local newspaper in 1938 and lived to see the surrender of Germany at the culmination of the second world war.

Frederick Minter found his name in the press on two occasions for the wrong reasons; firstly when he was accused of cruelty to a horse in Colchester market and, more seriously of an "indecent assault" on one Caroline Bird along with an accomplice William Philips although he was later cleared of this charge due to the unreliability of the witness and conflicting evidence.



**PC Nathan John Minter**

Nathan John Minter, despite a number of transfers, was based at Romford for much of his career as a policeman. First stationed in 1892 Grays, Essex, Nathan appears in numerous local contemporary newspaper reports and it was his melancholy duty to recover the bodies of the mutilated body of a man run over by a train and disembowelled and to give evidence at the subsequent inquest; that of a female suicide and of a man buried in a gravel pit following an industrial accident. He attended fires, arrested beggars along with the drunk and disorderly, on one occasion being bitten, kicked and had mud thrown at him by a female prisoner during an altercation in the Anchor Inn in Brentwood where he was stationed in 1895; he apprehended a soldier found absent without leave during World War I and even had two people fined for shining lights too brightly in their residences. For his efforts, when he retired in 1919 after 27 years service he was currently earning £130 7s 2d per annum and received an annual pension of £86.

Doubtless it was her husband's capacity as a policeman which contributed, in 1897 to his wife being threatened by one Emma Duckrombe who pulled down the gate in the couple's back yard and threatened to "cut her throat and wash her face in the blood" leading to Duckrombe's being bound over to keep the peace for six months. Two years before her death in 1931 Mary was elected as president of the south

ward of the Romford women's national unionist association, responsible for running conservative party conferences to honour her "valuable work" for the organisation.

*Children of William Johnson Minter and Harriett Dobson*

NAME	BORN	OCCUPATION	MARRIED	DIED
<b>Sarah Ann Minter</b>	24 December 1853 Great Horkesley, Essex	Domestic Servant	<b>Charles Norman</b> Q3 1873 Colchester Registration District, Essex	1930 Pancras Registration District, London
<b>George Henry Minter</b>	12 Jan 1856 Boxted, Essex	Dealer and Farmer	<b>Ellen Allen</b> 6 Jan 1877 Boxted, Essex	19 Nov 1910 Dedham, Essex
<b>William Johnson Minter</b>	Quarter 3 1858 Boxted, Essex	Agricultural Labourer	<b>Esther Elmer</b> 22 Nov 1879 Boxted, Essex	10 Nov 1945 Colchester, Essex
<b>Charles Edward Minter</b>	Quarter 4 1859 Boxted, Essex	Agricultural Labourer	Unmarried	21 June 1883 Boxted, Essex
<b>Thomas John Minter</b>	Quarter 3 1861 Boxted, Essex	Soldier	Unmarried	Quarter 4 1889 Lexden Registration District, Essex
<b>Albert Minter</b>	Quarter 1 1864 Boxted, Essex	Monumental Mason	<b>Julia Collins</b> 6 Aug 1877 Thornton Heath, St Paul, Croydon, London	16 Dec 1940 Norwood, London
<b>Walter William Minter</b>	Quarter 4 1865 Boxted, Essex	Agricultural Labourer	Unmarried	Quarter 1 1888 Lexden Registration District, Essex
<b>Margaret Minter</b>	Quarter 3 1867 Boxted, Essex		<b>Charles Lay Elmer</b> 28 Dec 1889 Boxted, Essex	Quarter 1 1939 Camberwell Registration District, London
<b>Mark Minter</b>	Quarter 3 1867 Boxted, Essex	Labourer	<b>Emily Sewell</b> 1 April 1888 All Saints, Upper Norwood, London	9 Jun 1937 Brockley, London
<b>Nathan Minter</b>	28 March 1869 Boxted, Essex		Unmarried	Quarter 2 1870 Lexden Registration District, Essex
<b>Nathan John Minter</b>	17 Jun 1871 Boxted, Essex	Policeman	<b>i Mary Ann Bacon</b> 8 April 1896 Lexden Registration District, Essex <b>ii Nellie M Edwards</b> Quarter 4 1932 Saffron Walden Registration District, Essex	26 December 1945 Romford Registration District, Essex
<b>Frederick Arthur Minter</b>	Quarter 2 1873 Boxted, Essex	Monumental Mason	<b>Alice Barnes</b> Quarter 4 1896 Wandsworth Registration District, London	bd 13 Jun 1914 Norwood Cemetery, London
<b>Mary Ann Minter</b>	Quarter 3 1876 Boxted, Essex		<b>John Ernest Went</b> 9 Jun 1904 Boxted, Essex	Colchester, Essex