

In June 1881 the Reverend John Spurgin included a newspaper article about Joseph Ashton in the Hockham Parish records.

Here is the transcript of that newspaper article.

HOCKHAM

JOSEPH ASHTON alias "Tinker Joe". The following letter has been recently delivered to our Northampton contemporaries regarding this well known character in the Eastern Counties. It is possible that some residents in the county of his adoption may be able to supply details in his lengthened history:

'TINKER JOE' THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE CENTENARIAN.

"Great Hockham Vicarage, Thetford.

"Sir,-There is residing in this parish, an old man by name Joseph Ashton. He was a Tinker by trade and a well-known character across the Eastern Counties as a veritable "---- babe". Ashton, though bed ridden for the last four years, has never had a days illness in his life; his faculties are perfectly clear. He was born at or near Kettering. His father "a----- waster" either deserted his family or was pressed into the War of American Independence. This, our hero remembers when a boy in jacket not so early an event in juvenile history now-a-days. His own words were "I was in my billet when he left". I have the date of the marriage of his father and mother (Thomas Ashton and Mary Bale) at Kettering in 1754. This is identified by his mother's maiden name, Ashton himself was married in this parish ad 1814 having travelled the county previously for some years as an itinerant tinker.

He was apprenticed as a pauper and by his Northamptonshire parish to a chimney sweep, but not admiring the trade, ran away and joined a camp of gipsies at Luton. His after life partook very much of their habits, returning home every Saturday night from his weeks tinkering and starting the first thing Monday morning with an old pony and cart and a pair of bellows. I ought to add he was always to be found in his place at church on the Sunday morning and his enforced absence therefore is his great lament. Now Sir, can any of your readers throw light upon the antecedents of this veritable man interesting alike to Northamptonshire and Norfolk? I have reason to believe he was born in Kettering or Geddlington, to which either of these he cleaves to as his birthplace. Any conjecture as to his real age must be necessarily hazardous failing written proof. By a comparison, however of the would be ages of his contemporaries in this neighbourhood, I am disposed to set his age at between 111 and 112 years. He was returned at the census, not at my suggestion, but I think correctly 111 years. Of course Ashton believes that this return bribes him of several years. "Oh I are sorts of years more than that!" Any information bearing upon the subject will be agreeably received by

Sir your obliged servant

JOHN SPURGIN

Vicar of Hockham, Norfolk