

Early Days at Kingscote

The digitisation of both census and Railway employment records make it quite easy to track the careers of railway staff. Here we look at the very early days at Kingscote.

We get a tantalising glimpse of the new station starting to take shape in April 1881 when that year's census records that the station was occupied by John Robinson, a civil engineer (aged 48 born in Kendal, Westmoreland); his wife Emily, aged 47 (born in Hadleigh, Suffolk); their son Richard aged 23, also described as a civil engineer.

Also, Alfred D Ackland (aged 22) is described as a "visitor"; his occupation is also given as a civil engineer. (The census tells us that he was born in Oxford.) They had two servants both 15 years of age; Grace Anscombe from Battersea and Edith Buckwell from Barcombe.

The first staff appointed to Kingscote on its opening on 1 Aug., 1882, were Thomas Ward (Station Master) and William Bodle and Charles Gilbert (Porter Signalmen). Thomas had previously been SM at Rotherhithe and would stay at Kingscote until his death in April 1904. He is interred in Queen's Road Cemetery, East Grinstead.

William was previously a porter at Grange Road whilst Charles had been a porter at Rowfant; he stayed at Kingscote until March 1884 when he transferred as a signalman to Lingfield. His place was taken by 18-year-old Ernest Cripps. In 1883 the SM's young son Thomas Fredrick joined the railway as "Acting Clerk"; sometime later the LB&SCR staff records show him as Station Master at Horham and Waldron Road.

In the Booking Office, Albert Arkell joined the Kingscote staff in September 1888, moving to Glynde in October 1890. His place was then taken by George Raw who subsequently moved to Forest Row in July 1892. Charles Gains transferred to Kingscote from Bramber in September 1892, being moved to Berwick in August 1893.

Matthew Greenfield joined as a new entrant from school in August 1893, resigning in April 1895. John Currie, also straight from school, took his place and was moved to Haywards Heath in May 1897 to be replaced by Benjamin Castledine (again, straight from school) who stayed until the following July, when he was sent to Barcombe Mills. His place was taken by yet another school leaver, Harold Jenner. This rapid turnover of staff would suggest that under Mr. Ward's guidance, Kingscote was seen as a good place to gain basic railway experience.

On the platform, William Edwards started sometime in 1888 and moved to be a signalman at Langstone in June 1892. Owen Chalcraft (who occupied one of the two "railway houses" at Kingscote), arrived in July 1889, leaving in June 1892 to become a full-time signalman at Pulborough. William Cottrell, a Relief Signalman at Lewes found himself transferred to Kingscote in June 1892 following what his staff record shows as a "Signalling Irregularity".

Albert Hutchins arrived from Billingshurst also in June 1892 but was moved to Grange Road in January 1893. Arriving in December 1892 Albert Charman would stay until March 1897 when he went to Bexhill. Another "character" to find himself as a porter signalman at Kingscote in September 1898 was Edward Pattenden. Edward had started as a booking clerk at Barcombe Mills in August 1893 and been transferred to Heathfield two years later.

Within a few months, he was considered “incompetent”, so, in December 1895, he found himself as a porter at Newhaven Town. Presumably he wasn’t that incompetent, as he was moved to Kingscote in March 1897 and then in October 1899 he was moved to Berwick, still as a signal porter. His place being taken by Ernest Grist, a porter from Portslade. Hubert Reigate on the other hand seemed a restless soul; having had spells as a porter at both Lancing and Eridge he arrived at Kingscote in April 1898 but resigned in July that year.

By Gordon Dudman