

Cotton

(An extract from a chapter of the book "Great Ayton – A History of the Village by Dan O'Sullivan")

In the 1790s there was also a cotton manufactory in the village. James Davison of Great Ayton, cotton manufacturer, insured machinery in his cotton mill, plus stock, for £800 in 1795, and again in 1797. We know from the assessments for the poor rate that Messrs Davison & Gilbertson paid tax on this mill between 1793 and 1802, and that the mill was rented from Nicholas Richardson, who was a wealthy corn merchant and brewer. He died in 1801, so presumably the mill was sold then, and Davison ceased to rent it. This was the mill housed in the building which is today part of Ayton school, and it is likely that the new owner, after 1801, was Philip Hesleton, who converted it into the linseed oil mill mentioned above.

Apparently there were other places about this time where there was a cotton mill in the middle of a mainly linen-producing area, such as Nidderdale and Barnsley. It may have been that the cotton yarn was used for mixed cloth, or that cotton was more profitable at certain times. Little else has come to light about Davison. According to the land tax returns he was living in 1799 in a large house owned by Ann Skottowe. The parish register shows that he had a daughter born in 1793, and two cotton weavers appear in the register at about the same time. His partner, James Gilbertson, seems to have left the village in 1801, but Davison remains in the assessments until 1803.