

Thomas Skottowe of Great Ayton (1695-1771) is important in the history of the village, and he even has a small niche in national history as the patron of James Cook. As is well known, he employed Cook's father at Aireyholme Farm between 1736 and 1755, and he subsequently gave or sold him a piece of land in the village on which to build himself a cottage for his retirement. This was the 'Cook's cottage' which was transported to Melbourne in 1934. And, of course, he paid for James Cook's schooling at the village's Postgate School. Recent research by Cliff Thornton has also shown that it was almost certainly Skottowe who secured James Cook a place as shop assistant at Staithes, when he first left Ayton in 1745. Skottowe was a close friend of William Sanderson who employed Cook, as is shown by the fact that in his will he made Sanderson a Trustee for a fund set up for the education of his granddaughter. Later still in Cook's career, when he decided to join the Royal Navy, Skottowe was able to help him yet again by contacting a friend, the Member of Parliament William Osbaldeston, whom he urged to write to Cook's naval captain, Hugh Palliser, recommending him for promotion.

Other facts about Thomas Skottowe are that he was the lord of the manor of Great Ayton, and lived at Ayton Hall. He married twice, and had altogether seven children, five boys and two girls, many of whom later made their mark in the world. As befitted his position in society he was active as a magistrate, and he presumably attended church regularly, since he applied for a faculty to build a gallery at All Saints church containing a private pew for himself and his family, so that they could enter the church by a separate entrance just opposite Ayton Hall. All this contributes to a view of Skottowe as a conventional and successful local squire and family man, using his powers of patronage appropriately, in Cook's case at least, and this is certainly how he is portrayed in the various biographies of Cook.

These facts may be true, but the impression given is somewhat misleading. Further investigation reveals that Skottowe was perhaps not particularly conventional, and certainly not successful. The evidence is fragmentary, but nevertheless a new portrait begins to emerge of a man permanently humiliated by financial troubles, who was forced to give up most of his property, sell his own home, and even yield up to others guardianship over his eldest son. The story starts in 1729, when Thomas Skottowe, at the age of 34 decided to quit his ancestral home in Norfolk and venture north into Yorkshire, accompanied by his twin brother, his wife, Anne, and their two sons. But to understand this decision one has to go back nearly a century, to the death of Christopher Coulson, merchant and citizen of London, in 1641.

Some years before he died, this Christopher Coulson had bought, from Sir David Foulis of Ingleby Greenhow, a large property in Great Ayton, which included about half the arable land of the parish, and also the lordship of the manor. The title was important since it conferred control, through the manorial court, of the village's entire agricultural system. Coulson himself seems never to have lived in Ayton, and presumably acquired this estate for his heirs. He had been born in Newby, a few miles from Ayton, and in his will he left funds and elaborate instructions for the founding of a school in that village, as well as for the poor of Newby and the neighbouring village of Seamer. His two sons, John and William, inherited the bulk of his estate.¹ William was given property and equipment in London connected with Christopher Coulson's trade of dyeing, while John, the elder, inherited the Ayton estate.

It is likely that this John came to Ayton with his wife, Elizabeth, immediately after his father's death, and took up residence at Ayton Hall. He is recorded as living in the largest house in the village in successive hearth tax assessments between 1662 and 1673, and the annual Manorial Court, of which some records survive from the mid-century, was held in his name between 1647 and 1661. He was responsible, along with other local landowners, for the enclosure of the village's open fields and commons in 1658. He died in 1674, and it was after his death that complications arose in the descent of the Ayton estate, which now became split into two. What seems to have happened is that some years before he died John made a settlement of part of the - estate, including the lordship, onto his eldest son, Christopher, which he was to receive on his marriage. This Christopher was a lawyer, but also participated in the family business of dealing in Norwich woollen cloth, and he lived in or near Norwich. He married Elizabeth Man, the daughter of a Norwich lord mayor, and hence acquired the Ayton estate, but he died in 1670, at the age of 35, four years before the death of his father. He left no male heirs, but a young daughter (who, unfortunately for the genealogist trying to untangle the Coulson descent, was also called Elizabeth, as were her mother and grandmother). In his will Christopher left all his lands to his wife during her life, and then to the male

¹will of Christopher Coulson the elder, PRO PROB/11/185

heirs of his three brothers, in order of seniority. Only if there were no such heirs by the time his daughter came to marry, was the property and lordship of Ayton to revert to the heirs of his own daughter.² And this, in fact, is what happened. None of Christopher's brothers had any children, and so this estate passed to Elizabeth, who married a certain Thomas Skottowe of Little Melton, a few miles from Norwich, by whom she had a son, also named Thomas.

Meanwhile, the other half of the Ayton estate, which included several farms in Great and Little Ayton together with a small mansion which is today known as the Manor House, was partitioned up and left to John Coulson's other children. But because all of them died young and childless except his second son, John, the whole of this estate ended up in the hands of this John. He had been brought up at Ayton Hall like all his siblings, but at some point he left Ayton and set up in South Shields as a merchant dealing in Norwich stuffs. He was a devout Presbyterian who before leaving Ayton Hall had built onto the back of the Hall the first Presbyterian chapel in the village. He was also apparently a confirmed bachelor until he was in his mid-sixties. We now come to the romantic part of the story. I quote from *The Leaf and the Tree*, a privately printed book about the Skottowe family:

A Mr Ware, who was the High Sheriff [of Buckingham], had three beautiful daughters; his brother, who was minister of the Baptist Chapel in Chesham, paid a visit to a friend named Coulson in Yorkshire, probably John Coulson, the uncle of Elizabeth, wife of Thomas Skottowe. The reverend gentleman spoke so highly of his nieces' charms that Coulson asked to see their portraits and finally selected one as his wife. Her sister Rebecca, while on a visit to her newly-married sister, met young Thomas Skottowe and became his first wife in 1717, dying after the birth of her son Coulson in 1719.³

In other words, one sister, Martha, married the elderly and wealthy Presbyterian merchant, John Coulson, while the other sister, Rebecca, chose the twenty-one-year-old Thomas Skottowe from Norfolk. What this extract fails to mention is that Skottowe's marriage was, as a lawyer later described it, 'a stolen match', without the permission or approval of the well-connected Ware family of Chesham.⁴ This fact had important consequences for our story. In the first place it meant that the impecunious Thomas Skottowe did not receive the marriage portion customary for those of his class. Secondly, it meant a breach between him and his powerful in-laws which was shortly to lead to a major humiliation.

In 1722 Skottowe remarried, this time to Anne Casrip (or Cassap), another twenty-one-year-old. There is some mystery about this lady. The marriage took place in South Shields where the Skottowes may have owned property, but Anne herself may have been partly or wholly French. Her mother, who moved to Great Ayton, and to whom Thomas Skottowe paid an annuity during her lifetime, is described in more than one document as 'Madame Edmeston, widow'. When she came to Ayton she must have been accompanied by another, much younger, daughter, Elizabeth, because an Elizabeth Edmeston of Great Ayton was to marry a William Longstaff in 1750. A note in the Ayton parish register explains that Anne, wife of Thomas Skottowe, and Elizabeth, wife of William Longstaff, were sisters, and that their mother was Madame Edmeston. All three are buried under the nave of All Saints church.

As mentioned above, John Coulson the younger married Martha Ware, one of the daughters of John Ware. It is clear from the will of this John Coulson, made in 1727, that he and the Ware family strongly disapproved of Thomas Skottowe.⁵ The will was a ruthless document in which John Coulson used his financial clout to humiliate Thomas Skottowe in his role as a father. It demanded that Skottowe hand over his eldest son, Coulson Skottowe, then aged eight, to the guardianship of the Ware family, the family of his deceased mother, Rebecca. Three guardians were nominated, who would henceforth be entirely responsible for his upbringing and education. They were: his aunt, Martha Ware, her father, John Ware, and the father's brother, Joshua Ware, the Baptist minister from Chesham. From now on, Thomas Skottowe must have nothing to do with his son, and not attempt to get him back under his own control. He was to sign legal contracts agreeing to these stipulations. If the terms were met, then he would receive £500 under the will. And when Coulson Skottowe came of age he would inherit all of John Ware's property including the Ayton estate, which until that time would be kept in trust for him by the Wares. But if the terms were

²will of Christopher Coulson the younger, PRO PROB///11/146

³Philip F. Skottowe, *The Leaf and the Tree*, privately printed, 1963

⁴NYCRO PR/AYG 6/7; letter written by attorney, John Matthews

⁵will of John Coulson, 1727; PRO PROB/11/614

broken he would inherit nothing. At the time of John Coulson's death, his father-in-law, John Ware, was living in his house in South Shields, so presumably the little boy then went to live there with his aunt and his great uncle.

About two years later, at the age of 34, Thomas Skottowe decided to make the move to Great Ayton with the remainder of his family. Before he left Norfolk he made an agreement with his father that he would pay him an annual pension for the rest of his life provided he renounced any interest in the Ayton property. He took up residence at Ayton Hall, while his twin brother, Coulson, settled in Stokesley. But even at this stage the various farms he had inherited through his mother were encumbered with debt. The burdens of mortgage may have already started during the lifetime of Christopher Coulson the younger, whose will shows that he left debts of £700. By 1729, the year he probably made the move, Thomas Skottowe already owed £1,200, largely to his ex-father-in-law, John Ware. And for the next thirty years the debts steadily accumulated: In 1731 he owed £2,500; by 1743 the total was £4,000 plus interest; by 1758 it was £9,168. Skottowe seems to have borrowed from everybody he could think of, including his relations and the local money-men of the district. The most prominent of these was probably Ralph Ward of Guisborough whose diary detailing his financial transactions has luckily survived. Ralph Ward's diary shows that Skottowe frequently rode the five miles from Ayton to Guisborough to request another loan. To give just two examples out of many:

28 July 1756

- Mr Skottowe came here about 11 desiring me to lend him £500 upon a new mortgage. I promised him £200 in a month's time and the Rest about 2 months after, he did but stay to drink a glass of wine and returned.

28 October 1756

- Mr Skottowe himself came here to speak to me about renewing his Mortgage and to Borrow £1000 more, but I could not determine with him anything about it until some time after this.⁶

It could hardly have been a comfortable role for the lord of the manor to play, having to visit the local money lender in order to beg for additional funds - and sometimes being refused into the bargain.

Exactly why Thomas Skottowe's expenditure always exceeded his income we shall perhaps never know, but clearly it did. Perhaps he was an incompetent manager, or possibly he had expenses which we do not know about. Whatever it was, the burden of debt had clearly become unsustainable by 1758 because this was the *annus horribilis*, the year that he was forced to sell most of his landed property including several farms, among which was Aireyholme, the largest in the parish by acreage. Aireyholme with its 434 acres went to Michael Smith of Marske, a rich, elderly gentleman, who bought it for a marriage portion for his granddaughter, Susannah Duck, who was engaged to marry Bartholomew Rudd of Marton.⁷ Other farms were bought by a range of purchasers, including Thomas Wayne of Angrove, John Richardson of Langbaugh, and William Emerson of Easby. But the most humiliating stroke of all for Thomas Skottowe must have been the necessity of parting with his own home, Ayton Hall, which went to the Rev. Daniel Wilson, who only remained three years before moving to Lancaster, and selling up to Commodore William Vy Wilson, late of the East India Company. By this time, too, Thomas Skottowe had long been a widower, as his second wife, Anne died in 1751. He went to live next door, at the much smaller 'Manor House', on the charity of his eldest son, Coulson. Coulson Skottowe himself had inherited property in Ayton according to the terms of John Coulson's will, but he had inherited still more from his great uncle, John Ware, and this legacy included a large estate in Chesham where it seems he chose to spend much of his life rather than in Ayton.

The evidence of deeds shows that even after 1758 Thomas Skottowe was not free from debt. When he died, in 1771, he left what property he still had to Augustine, the only one of his four sons by his second marriage who had stayed in Ayton. But a substantial mortgage went with it, and Augustine continued to sell bits and pieces of land, much as his father had done before him. Augustine seems to have chosen to lead a peaceful life as a farmer - he lived at Grange farm, later rebuilt as 'The Grange' by the Kitching family. However, his three brothers, John, Nicholas and Thomas, all had successful careers in far-flung parts of the British Empire. John was governor of Saint Helena from 1764 to 1782; Nicholas became a captain in the East India Company and made several voyages to India and China; Thomas became a senior official in South Carolina, until the outbreak of the American War of

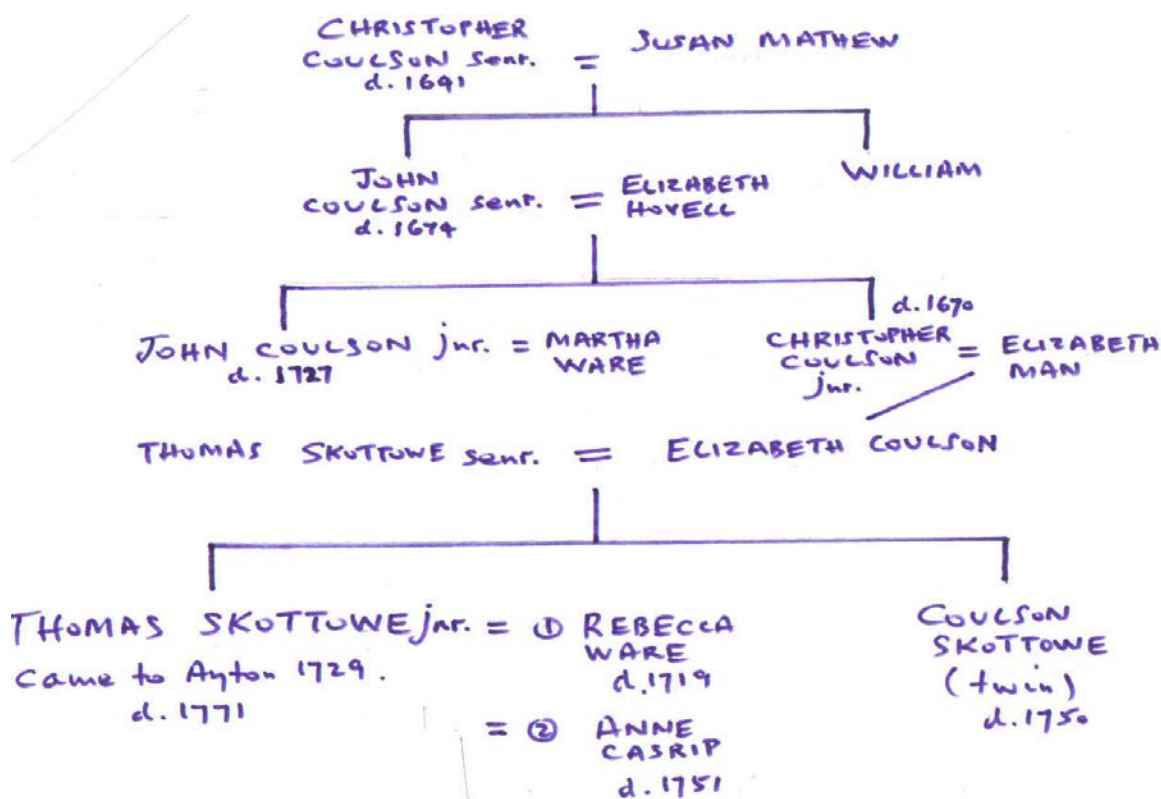
⁶Ralph Ward's Journal, published by The Yorkshire Archaeological Society in Two Yorkshire Diaries, 1952.

⁷NYCRO Register of deeds ASC 507/665

Independence forced him to return home. And one of their two sisters, Anne, married a scholar and politician, Robert Wood, who also had an eventful and successful career. Their respective adventures are chronicled in *The Leaf and the Tree*, the book about the Skottowe family mentioned above. As Phillip F. Skottowe, the author of that book, suggested, Thomas Skottowe's real claim to fame was that he brought up such an impressive brood, a feat which perhaps qualifies him to be christened 'one of the backroom boys in the creation of the British Empire'.⁸ As far as Great Ayton is concerned, his significance is perhaps that he caused to be divided up into bits an inheritance which, but for him, might have remained intact. This was a process already started by John Coulson the elder, when he split his inheritance between his various offspring. The net result was probably beneficial to the village in the long term, as a number of smaller holdings are, on balance, likely to give rise to more innovation and progress than is a unified estate under a single landlord. Rut this, of course, was no compensation for the unfortunate Thomas Skottowe!

⁸*The Leaf and the Tree*, p.20

1. COULSON & SKOTTOWE FAMILY TREE



2 THOMAS SKOTTOWE'S CHILDREN

