

The Courts of Quarter Sessions were local courts traditionally held at four set times each year. They generally sat in the seat of each county and county borough. Quarter Sessions were held at Epiphany, Easter, Midsummer and Michaelmas.

The Quarter Sessions generally heard crimes that could not be tried summarily by the justices of the peace without a jury in petty sessions, which were sent up by the process of indictment to be heard in Quarter Sessions. The Quarter Sessions did not have jurisdiction to hear the most serious crimes, most notably those subject to capital punishment or later life imprisonment. These crimes were sent for trial at the periodic Assizes.

The Quarter Sessions in each county were made up of two or more Justice of the Peace, and presided over by a Chairman, who sat with a jury. Every Quarter Sessions had a clerk called the clerk of the peace. If the accusation is found to be true, the words "a true bill" are used; if the jury is not satisfied that the accusation is true, the words "bill not found" are used.

The records at Northallerton are very large and not indexed. Covering the whole of the North Riding, it is difficult to find references to Great Ayton. Fortunately a project is underway, led by Ellen Tout with a team of volunteers, to catalogue the records. The thirteen items so far identified as connected with Great Ayton are summarised here, with additional explanatory notes.

Reference Q/DP/M/285

North Eastern Railway plan: North Riding Quarter Sessions, 1894

Eston branch railway, for widening of the York Newcastle railway at Thirsk, Otterington and at Northallerton; plus plans for additional land required at Great Ayton and at Haxby.

Engineers: H Coperthwaite, C A Harrison, W J Curdworth

Consulting Engineer: Barry J Wolfe

The maps and plans have been microfilmed MIC 2951/20-71.

Reference Q/SB/1728/6

Quarter Sessions: presentments and bills of indictment heard at:

Easingwold on 9 January 1727/28

Richmond on 16 January 1727/28

Thirsk on 30 April 1727/28 This included "Inhabitants of Great Ayton" and five presentments relating to the highways of Hutton Lowcross, Pinchinthorpe, Great Ayton, Stokesley and Whorlton.

Guisbrough on 16 July 1728

Northallerton on 23 July 1728

Thirsk on 8 October 1728

Reference Q/SB/1796-Q2/6/1

Bill of indictment for felony

William Sturdy, late of the House of Correction at Northallerton, weaver, for stealing one sackwebb poke value 10d, the property of William Farmery.

Offence committed at the Parish of Great Ayton on 13 March 1796.

Endorsed with the names of witnesses and "a true bill".

Note: 'Sackwebb poke' probably refers to a quantity of wool. A sack of wool was 364 pounds in weight; a poke was a variable measure, at least two sacks. So this was a substantial quantity of wool.

Reference Q/SB/1796-Q2/6/12

Bill of indictment for receiving stolen goods

Elizabeth Armstrong late of the House of Correction at Northallerton, widow, for receiving one goose value 10d, the property of John Langhorn and stolen by William Bennison, knowing the goose to have been stolen.
Offence committed at the Parish of Great Ayton on 13 March 1796.
Endorsed with the names of witnesses and "a true bill".

Reference Q/SB/1796-Q2/6/13

Bill of indictment for felony

William Bennison, flaxdresser, and William Sturdy, weaver, both late of the House of Correction at Northallerton, for stealing one peck of wheat value 10d, the property of Thomas Lamb.
Offence committed at the Parish of Great Ayton on 17 December 1795.
Endorsed with the names of witnesses and "a true bill".

Note: One peck was two gallons.

Reference Q/SB/1796-Q2/6/15

Bill of indictment for felony

William Bennison, late of the House of Correction at Northallerton, flaxdresser, for stealing one goose value 10d, the property of John Langburn.
Offence committed at the Parish of Great Ayton on 13 March 1796.
Endorsed with the names of witnesses and "a true bill".

Reference Q/SB/1796-Q2/8

Easter Quarter Sessions: informations, depositions and examinations

Informations and examinations of:

John Langburn of Great Ayton

Thomas Codling of Great Ayton

Thomas Atkins of Great Ayton

William Farmery of Great Ayton

William Sturdy of Great Ayton

William Harrison and James Gill, two of His Majesty's soldiers in the ? Ancient British Regiment of ? Fencibles.

Notes: The terms information, deposition and examination are often used interchangeably, but they have distinctive definitions: an information is a formal criminal accusation, a deposition contains evidence provided by witnesses, and an examination is the result of the interrogation of the accused. Here we have an accusation and an interrogation of the accused. It would seem that they relate to the above cases.

Ancient British Fencible Regiments were regiments of infantry or cavalry raised under feudal obligations. In 1796 there were Fencibles at York. Land at Fulford was purchased in 1793 as part of William Pitt's barrack-building campaign. The first buildings were erected in 1795-96. In October 1795 three troops of the Ancient British Fencibles moved in. Whether or not the two soldiers were connected with the Great Ayton cases is unknown.

Reference Q/SB/1796-Q4/6/7

Bill of indictment for felony

John Thompson, late of the House of Correction at Northallerton, labourer, and Christian, his wife, for stealing one cotton handkerchief value 6d, the property of Jaspar Charlton.
Offence committed at the Parish of Great Ayton on 10 September 1796.
Endorsed with the names of witnesses and "a true bill".

Reference Q/SB/1802-Q4/6/15

Bill of indictment for felony

Mary Marley, late of the House of Correction at Northallerton, widow, for stealing one sack of flour value 10d, property of Thomas Hall.

Offence committed at the Parish of Great Ayton on 23 September 1802.
Endorsed with the names of witnesses and "bill not found".

Note: A sack of flour was 280 pounds weight.

Reference Q/SB/1806-Q3/14

Midsummer Quarter Sessions: general administrative papers 1805-1806

Papers relating to the administrative functions of the court, including:

- Alehouse recognizances (three items)
- Gamekeepers deputation: George Jackson appointed gamekeeper by Henry Richardson for the manors and land of Great Ayton and Little Ayton, 16 July 1805 (one item)
- Corn declaration, 28 June 1806 (one item)

Reference Q/SB/1812-Q1/6/1

Bill of indictment for assault

William Thoroughbeck, late of the Parish of Great Ayton, yeoman, for assaulting William Hodgson.

Offence committed at the Parish of Great Ayton on 1 January 1812.

Endorsed with the names of witnesses and "a true bill".

Reference Q/SB/1812-Q3/9

Midsummer Quarter Sessions: general judicial papers, 1812

Papers relating to the judicial business of the court, including:

- Cause paper, listing appeals, traverses, recognizances to prosecute and give evidence, and recognizances to appear and answer (one item)
- 'Record' for the case against William Thoroughbeck of Great Ayton for assault, endorsed Northallerton Midsummer Sessions 14 July 1812. With writ and blank list of jurors to hear the case (one item)
- 'Record' for the case against William Spence, David Whorlton, Robert Cole, John Jackson, George Jackson, Thomas Flounders, and Matthew Appleton the younger, of Hutton Rudby, for riot, endorsed Northallerton Midsummer Sessions 14 July 1812. With writ and blank list of jurors to hear the case (one item)
- 'Record' for the case against John Banks of Brafferton for misdemeanour, endorsed Northallerton Midsummer Sessions 14 July 1812. With writ and blank list of jurors to hear the case (one item)
- 'Record' for the case against John Softley of Danby Wiske for assault, endorsed Northallerton Midsummer Sessions 14 July 1812. With writ and blank list of jurors to hear the case (one item)

Reference Q/SB/1813-Q4/9

Michaelmas Quarter Sessions: general judicial papers, 1813

Papers relating to the judicial business of the court, including:

- Cause paper, listing appeals, traverses, recognizances to prosecute and give evidence, and recognizances to appear and answer and recognizances in bastardy (one item)
- 'Record' for the case against Thomas Spink, late of the township of Staithes in the parish of Hinderwell, for assault, endorsed Michaelmas Sessions 5 October 1813. With writ and blank list of jurors to hear the case (one item)
- 'Record' for the case against George Ripley, late of the Parish of West Witton, for assault, endorsed Michaelmas Sessions 5 October 1813. With writ and blank list of jurors to hear the case (one item)
- 'Record' for the case against Joseph Tose, late of the House of Correction at Northallerton, for assault, endorsed Michaelmas Sessions 5 October 1813. With writ and blank list of jurors to hear the case (one item)
- 'Record' for the case against William Garbutt, late of the Parish of Whorlton, for misdemeanour, endorsed Michaelmas Sessions 5 October 1813. With writ (one item)
- 'Record' for the case against William Humble, late of the Parish of Crathorne, for misdemeanour, endorsed Michaelmas Sessions 5 October 1813. With writ and blank list of jurors to hear the case (one item)
- 'Record' for the case against George Scoby, late of the Parish of Kirby, for misdemeanour, endorsed Michaelmas Sessions 5 October 1813. With writ and blank list of jurors to hear the case (one item)

- 'Record' for the case against John Easby, late of Nunthorpe in the Parish of Great Ayton, for misdemeanour, endorsed Michaelmas Sessions 5 October 1813. With writ (one item)
- Instructions for indictments (four items)