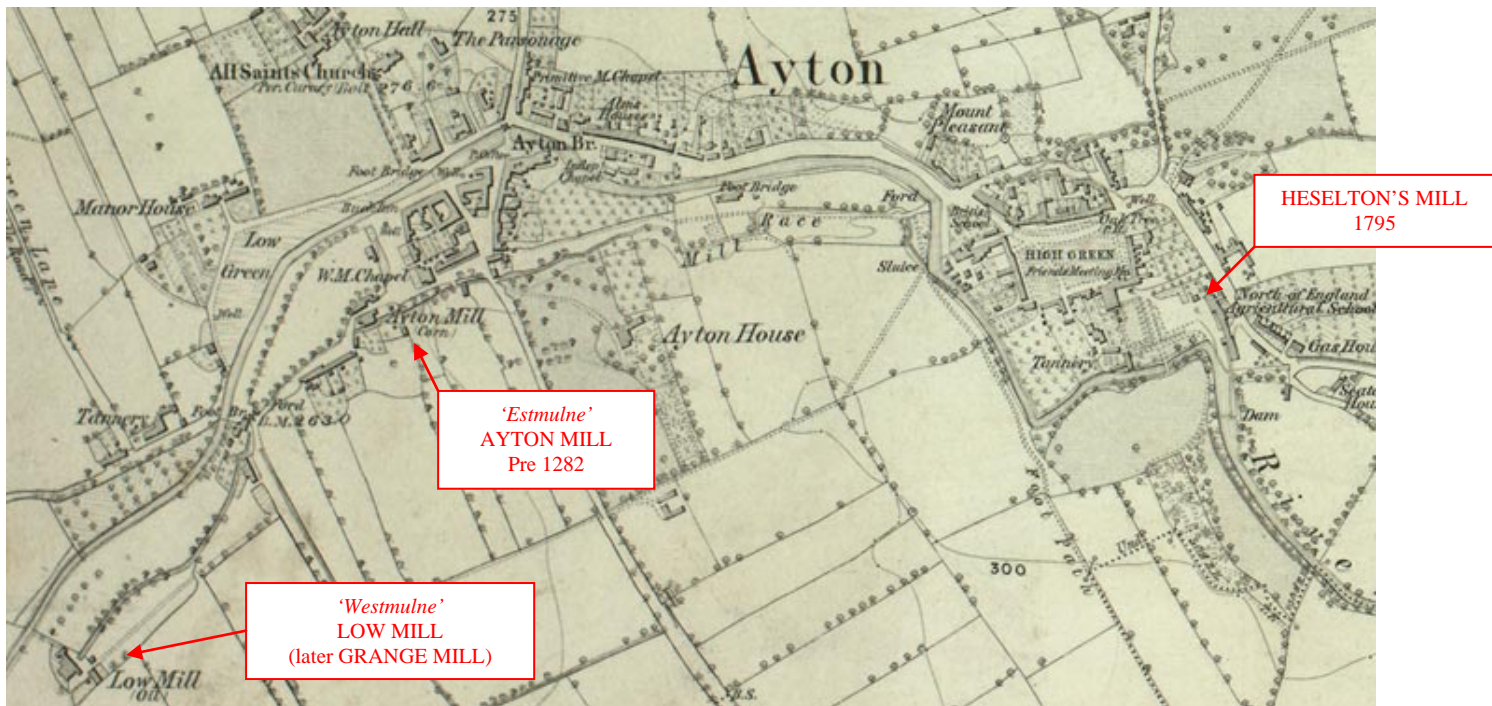


Most medieval villages had a mill. Flour was a necessity of life and by building a Manorial mill a Lord of the Manor had a reliable source of income. Soke Rights (Thirlage) compelled the villeins to take their grain to the manorial mill and the penalties for not doing so were severe. Even the use of hand querns was suppressed during this time.

The Domesday Book mentions a mill at Stokesley but none within the several Manors which subsequently became Great Ayton Parish. Three watermills were, however, presently established.



1856 ORDNANCE SURVEY MAP

One unusual feature is that the two ancient mills (Ayton Mill and Low Mill) share a common dam and race. That is, the tail race from Ayton Mill, instead of returning the water directly back to the river, was extended to carry the water down to Low Mill. The reason for this must be because there is not another suitable point to dam the river in order to provide an independent supply for Low Mill: the river banks become lower and the 'flood plain' wider below the present dam.

It also suggests that there must have been close co-operation between the owners; we know that on his death in 1282 Baldwin Wake (Lord of the Manor) owned Low Mill and a quarter share of Ayton Mill.

Heselton's Mill was not established until the late 18th century. Being upstream there was a fear that its operation could interfere with the water supply to the earlier mills and the law suite of 1804 was the result. (see details)

Once established a mill site was a source of power and this could be used for various purposes.

Whereas Ayton Mill remained a corn mill throughout, the function of Low Mill and Heselton's Mill altered several times as technology and economic demand changed.

The fascination, as always, is in being able to trace the present day evidence which is still visible of these most important contributors to village life.