

A brief article by JOHN HARRISON for the Spring 1999 issue of "THE STREAM" (the village magazine)

Medieval "Aton in Cleveland" was in a prime position, surrounded by rolling, well-drained land suitable for the plough, & well placed for serving outlying communities at Kildale and Ingleby Greenhow. Not surprisingly, by 1282 it had 2 early water-driven corn mills, both earning very high rentals.

The bad days of the early 14th century saw the Scots Raids the murraine or cattle disease and of course, the fearsome Black Death. Great Ayton had its share of trouble and by 1353 the revenue from the 2 mills had fallen to only about one tenth of that of the previous century. One had become redundant, & was converted to fulling cloth.

By 1808 there had been further changes. Then, there were 3 water-driven mills; an oil mill in what is now the grounds of the Friends' School, the Ayton Mill of the 1895 OS map, at the end of the leat running from the dam opposite Suggitts' shop and along Race Terrace to a site which later became the gasworks, and the "Low Mill" (1857 OS) or "Grangemill" (1893 OS) beyond the west end of the village.

With permission of the Kitching family, Grange Mill was surveyed in 1972 by a team of students from South Park Sixth Form College, Normanby. The main machinery had already gone and both ends of the range were converted into dwellings but there was an interesting sluice gate mechanism by Gilkes of Kendal, a well-preserved waterwheel pit & an elevated cruck beam in the roof of the mill. It seems that a water-driven turbine from Gilkes' was brought to Grange Mill from Friends' School in 1944, producing electricity until 1957. Corn milling had ceased long before. Milling stopped at Ayton Mill in 1910; the last owner was George Metcalfe, & the last miller Jim Hoggett, we are told.

The oil milling operation of the turn of the 18th-19th century is interesting. The seeds of flax (linseed) & jute were crushed, heated, then squeezed to extract the oil. The "cake" residue was used to feed cattle, or as manure while the oil was used for lamp fuel and paint, Robert Kettlewell in "Cleveland Village", 1938 says that there had been 2 oil mills: one at Grange Mill & the other on "part of the site of the friends' School"

Philip Heselton is said to have started the trade at Great Ayton. He operated the higher oil mill & leased the oil mill at Grange mill from John Richardson of Langbaugh. Both families were also involved in early trade on the River Tees & the Richardsons were later involved in a major tannery business on the River Tyne. Named members of the Richardson family of the early period were John, Henry, & Nicholas. Philip Heselton married the daughter of one of them.

John's book, the culmination of 40 years research, is the authoritative work for North East Yorkshire and gives details of all the mills of the area along with overall developments in milling.

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