

A few notes about Henry Kitching from the Kitching family

At one time the Kitchings were weavers in Darlington, and became early converts to the Society of Friends in the mid-18th century. Brothers Alfred and William Kitching started the Hopetown Railway Foundry in 1832 building steam locomotives. The Hopetown Foundry closed in 1860 and Alfred built himself a large country mansion at "Ayton Firs", between Little Ayton and Stokesley, on the site of a run-down farm. Alfred Kitching (1808-1882) had married Mary l'Anson Cudworth in 1852, and they had three sons: John, Alfred Edward and Henry.

All three sons had business interests in railways and the iron industry in the north east, particularly Darlington. Alfred was Mayor of Darlington from 1870 to 1871. He is recorded as having died leaving a large fortune, much of which was probably derived from the Whessoe Foundry, which he had started and which two of his sons continued to run until about the end of the 19th century. John Kitching (1856-1935) lived at Branksome Hall, Darlington and also at Richmond on Thames. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society and a member of the Athenaeum.

Alfred Edward Kitching (1858-1938) inherited Ayton Firs from his father. He married Annie Backhouse Richardson. Her parents were from celebrated Quaker families in the north east: her father was Joseph Richardson of Potto Hall and her mother was Ann Backhouse of the banking family. Their son Harold (1885-1980) was in the rowing eight that won the bronze medal in the 1908 Olympics. Alfred Edward donated the site for the Edward Kitching School in the village.

Henry Kitching (d.1934) converted an existing farmhouse into "The Grange", beyond Low Green. Henry was a keen cricketer, as will be seen from these notes and from his other writings. He also wrote about the collapse of the Pease business empire, in a notebook held in the Durham County Record Office. Henry Kitching and Major R B Turton of Kildale Hall were the magistrates hearing the case of the murder of Frank Ward at Ingleby Incline Foot Cottages in 1924. One of Henry's sons, Noel, was instrumental in providing the village with its own ambulance and St John Ambulance Hall. He usually drove the ambulance himself, at all times of the day and night and in all weathers, taking one of his employees to act as stretcher bearer. He was also a keen cricketer and had his own cricket field at "The Grange" where friendly (that is non-league) matches were played.

Transcription of Henry Kitching's Notes on Great Ayton

Henry Kitching wrote his notes about the village by hand in a stapled exercise book. He started after Christmas in 1917, and ended in February 1918. The ending is rather abrupt, and there may be more notes later on, to be traced by his descendants. His style, as was usual at the time, was rather verbose, but the writing is clear and the spelling accurate, with no corrections or mistakes.

Some of the content is taken from standard references, and some articles are shorter on information that one might wish, but there are many fascinating comments about village personalities. There are also some telling commentaries about life over ninety years ago: Henry bemoans the pace of life compared with the past, and the way state education was stifling individualism.

This is a verbatim transcription, although the number of paragraphs has been reduced. Henry tended to write in very long sentences, with numerous semicolons and commas, with often one sentence per paragraph. Explanatory notes and comments are in blue type.

NOTES ON GREAT AYTON
By Henry Kitching of Ayton Grange

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THE APPEARANCE OF THE VILLAGE IN EARLIER TIMES

If we wish to obtain a picture of the extent of the village of Great Ayton in earlier times, and by that is meant the Stuart Period, we must eliminate the part known as California and centre our imagination upon the High and Low Green and the older houses connecting them; thatch was generally used for the covering in of the dwellings, and the rooms were usually low, for health considerations did not engage the attention of the earlier builders, for there were no bye-laws with which to conform.

The main street of the village remains as it was, it crosses the Leven at the ford over which the stone-bridge was subsequently erected, and we learn that its bad condition was caused by the alum industry that was in full operation about that era.

Our attention would be attracted by the sound of the weaver's loom; and beyond the confines of the village we should find the agriculture brought about by the great Elizabethan revival in full operation.

The villagers would be found to be a self-contained and self-centred community, and holding little intercourse with the people around them for the long working hours stood in the way. Stokesley would be the market town. Middlesbro unknown, and Stockton only visited when occasion arose. "Folk did not travel far in those days" according to Robert Fawcett the octogenarian shoemaker who died quite recently, and who cited an instance in a relative who lived at Bartle Farm who had never visited Newton nor Little Ayton during her long life.

It was an age of superstition, the ghost of Angrove Hall cast its spell upon a later generation, although the exact date is difficult to hit upon, and it continued down to modern times for who does not recollect Tommy Scott getting open Gribdale Gate every New Year's Eve to let the New Year in?

If a journey had been taken from the High Green to Guisbro' the traveller was required to go down the village to the ford to reach the main road, as California had not been opened yet, nor the road through it constructed.

We catch a glimpse of the rise of the tanning industry a little later on, and we can appreciate the reason for the planting of the numerous oak trees that abound round the village for the bark was in much in request in the preparation of the hides, and we recall the pioneers of those far-off days, the Richardsons of Langbaugh; the highly respected Mary Martin, who died in 1867 at the age of 86, and the Jacksons, the last survivors of the trade. [Henry must mean Elizabeth or Betsy Martin \(1781-1867\); she was the last owner of the extensive Cleveland Tannery between High Green and the River Leven.](#)

The three corn mills would be actively employed in the preparation of food for the service of man; we can locate some of the many public houses with which the village was supplied, and picture the inhabitants flocking to them - for they were the pioneers of the clubs of a later date (and note the usual brawls at the hour of closing).

Horse-play was very prevalent until the arrival of the constable, and free fights were liable to take place between the villagers and the Irish labourers, who were in the habit of coming into Cleveland to assist in the reaping of the corn.

Great Ayton possessed a medicinal well that was to be found not far from the whinstone dyke on the Ayton and Guisbrough road, which was supposed to be beneficial in cases of ague, ophthalmic and other diseases.

The old church ministered to the spiritual needs of the parish until the coming of George Fox in the district. His powerful preaching brought about a great religious revival in Cleveland, for he tells us that he found its people very responsive.

One is almost led to conclude that Quakerism became a fashion, we hear of Meeting Houses springing up in Ayton, Stokesley, Great Broughton, Castleton and Guisbro, Bilsdale also became permeated, and Laskill Meeting sprang into existence, for the preaching of the founder of the Society of Friends was admirably suited to an agrarian population.

The records remain almost silent regarding education until we find the name of Michael Postgate. He built a single room for a school house in 1704 for the instruction of 8 poor boys, finding the master's salary out of his own pocket. The room and master's house were subsequently pulled down and on the site was erected a new school house temp 1785-6 and three new houses to be let to poor inhabitants of the village at a yearly rent of 16s/8 per dwelling. [In fact these houses were rent-free.](#)

It was in the old school (house) that Captain Cook received the rudiments of his education at the expense of Thomas Skottowe, the Lord of the manor, for he was born in 1728, and was killed in 1779 or 6 or 7 years before the erection of the later building to which reference has just been made. The tablet that has recently been fixed to the Postgate School in memory of the great explorer indicates the spot on which the building stood, but not the school itself as the following extract goes to prove.

Money raised by 11 men of landed property	100	-	-
By a general rate on landowners already mentioned	<u>100</u>	-	-
Total for building Poor House and School	200	-	-
Materials of the old School-house and dwelling valued at	10	-	-
Two legacies left by Ann Stockton £10 each	20	-	-
Two legacies left by an old neighbour and his wife	<u>20</u>	-	-
Total	£250	-	-

The reference to Thomas Skottowe recalled some of the earlier land owners in the parish of Great Ayton with whom it is my purpose to deal in the article following. We shall be able to follow the manner in which the land passed from one family to another, and witness the well appreciated fact that ownership of real estate is frequently brought about by trading successes. It is by such means, or by gifts from the Crown, that ownership has been brought about, for the vicissitudes attaching to the soil are too great to permit of any other way.

31st December 1917

From "The First Publishers of Truth" (Friends' Historical Society
 "And in Cleveland ye sd John Whitehead (Temp 1652) was instrumental to gather and settle meetings ... at Guisbrough ... att Stowseley ... att Osmotherley etc."

EARLIER LANDOWNERS

In the Domesday we find that the township of Ayton Magna contained three district manors, viz:

- 1 Lands of the King
- 2 Lands of the Earl of Mortain
- 3 Lands of Robert Mallett

But before proceeding further it is useful to ascertain the meaning of the word “manor”. In this particular survey it means the district over which a feudal chief or Lord exercised jurisdiction.

There is nothing more to be found regarding Nos. 1 and 2, it is probable that they became merged into No. 3, regarding which we are told that in the reign of King Stephen Robert de Estoteville, a member of the family that came over with William the Conqueror, and who fought at the Battle of the Standard, died possessed of it.

It remained with the Estotevilles until the 17th year of the reign of Henry the Third, when it passed by marriage of Joan, daughter of Nicholas de Estoteville to Hugh, son of Baldwin de Wake, in whose family it remained till the reign of Edward the Third. As the sons of Hugh died without issue, it passed to a daughter, Margaret, widow of Edmund de Woodstock, Earl of Kent, from whom it descended to Sir Thomas Holland Kt, by marriage with Joan, her daughter.

Afterwards, by marriage, it became annexed to the extensive possessions of the Nevilles, earls of Westmorland, but was forfeited in the reign of Queen Elizabeth on the attainder ([forfeiture of estate as a consequence of sentence of death](#)) of Charles, Earl of Westmorland, who lost an estate of £30,000 per annum, an enormous sum in those days. He fled to Flanders and lived on a slender pension allowed him by the King of Spain, and died in penury in 1584, when the title became extinct.

In the reign of James the First it was granted by the King to Sir David Foulis, a fellow countryman, who sold it in the reign of Charles the First to Christopher Coulson, dyer, a citizen of London, from whom it descended to his son John, referred to as of Ayton, County York.

It passed again by marriage into the possession of the Skottowe family, East India merchants, of Bramerton, County Norfolk, and in turn became the property of Henry Richardson of Stockton and Ayton, to whom it descended to the Proctors. The Proctor's Trustees continued to hold the manorial rights until recently, when they were transferred to the Great Ayton Parish Council. [Only one of Thomas Skottowe's five sons was connected with the East India Company.](#)

The Richardson family is easily traced, for the Langbaugh connection exists uninterruptedly until the death of John Richardson in 1881, or roughly for a period of two hundred years, when their possessions passed into other hands.

It is difficult to determine the acreage held by the Richardsons at the high-water mark of their ownership, which would probably be about one hundred years ago, owing to the absorption of the Skottowe interest, for although the will of Henry Richardson, a considerable purchaser, is very explicit, that of his elder brother, Willie, is just the reverse. The latter leaves all his messuages, lands, tenements and hereditaments whatsoever and wheresoever and of what nature and tenure so ever on trust to his friends, Edward Pease of Darlington and William Baker of Castleton. In so doing we are left totally in the dark regarding the extent of his possessions in land. When, however, we go through the schedule of the property devised by Henry Richardson, and add to it that which can be traced belonging to his elder brother, Willie, and the possessions of Christopher and Nicholas Richardson, members of an older branch, our contention is beyond dispute.

I have been unable to learn anything regarding the personality of Henry Richardson but it is recorded of old Willie that he died prematurely at the age of ninety from the effects of a chill contracted by his continuing to wear a wet suit of clothes in spite of the remonstrance of those around him. The talented author of *The Richardsons of Cleveland* reported him as saying: "I have gone out all my life without minding the weather or thinking of changing my clothes, and I won't begin now."

I have been unable to ascertain the acreage belonging to William Masterman, referred to as late of Restormil Park, in the County of Cornwall, whose will is dated 1784. He possessed property in Yorkshire, Durham, Bedfordshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire and Leicestershire, as well as a share in the navigation of the River Stort; and one of whose Trustees under the will is John Preston of Stokesley, a name that reminds us of the Preston Grammar School at that town.

In the list must be included the Heseltons, weavers of linen, huckaback and sail-cloth, from whom the estate belonging to the Friends' School was purchased through the munificence of Thomas Richardson, whose portrait is to be found in the dining-room of the institution, regarding which I propose a few words in another chapter.

1st January 1918

THE NORTH OF ENGLAND AGRICULTURAL SCHOOL

When I think of the North of England Agricultural School, normally referred to as the Ayton Friends' School, I am frequently reminded of the misconception that continues to exist regarding the origin of its foundation. It is the popular belief that it owes its existence to Thomas Richardson. In one sense, this is perfectly true for Thomas Richardson's timely gift of £5000 subject to its being placed at Ayton overthrew the claims of Darlington and Bishop Auckland, but the germ of the idea belongs to the credit of Jonathan Backhouse, the Darlington Banker. Jonathan Backhouse was a far-seeing man, and he was ably supported by his gifted wife, Hannah Chapman, whose name was very prominent in the Society of Friends in her day and generation.

They diagnosed the needs of the Society, and the growing number of those who were on the fringe, and they proceeded to work to meet their requirements. We may initially digress for a moment to clear up this particular point, and with that intent turn to the copy of the minutes that was presented to the Spring Durham Quarterly Meeting that was held at Darlington in 1841 which ran as follows:-

“The education of children, the offspring of parents not in affluence, who are connected with our Religious Society by membership and otherwise, especially the latter, with reference to the establishment of a school in which agriculture and other labour may be combined with learning, having in a general Conference again occupied the attention of Friends, it has been found that there is much ground to encourage the proceeding, and a willingness on their part to extend pecuniary and other aid.

He number of children is considerable, and Friends have now the offer of subscriptions to a large amount, including a very liberal gift from Thomas Richardson, of Stamford Hill, towards the purchase of a Freehold Estate at Ayton of about seventy-five acres of land and suitable buildings which may be obtained for the sum of £6,500.

It is therefore agreed to ask the sanction of Durham Quarterly Meeting to our further progress and request, should it see right, that it will take the proposed Institution under its general care by appointing Friends as Trustees for the property, as well as the time and place for the holding of General Meetings, accepting also an annual report, and extending such further aid as may appear in accordance with its relative position to the school which will, it is hoped, extend its benefits to the North of England generally, and more extensively if required.”

But to return - at the request of Jonathan Backhouse, George Dixon of Bishop Auckland visited Brookfield School, Ireland, Penketh and Rawdon as the nature of their education corresponded with the aim of the promoter and at this point we may direct attention to the History of Ayton School, published for the Jubilee Committee in 1891 if further information is required, it contains a remarkably clear account of the formation of the school, its gradual development, and its growing usefulness as a centre of education, written, happily, by the pen of the first superintendent, to whom all the facts were very familiar; George Dixon is no longer with us but he has left us a literary legacy that will increase in value as years go by. [In spite of Henry Kitching's suggestion that his version of events concerning Thomas Richardson and Jonathan Backhouse was not widely known, it is exactly the same as that in the History of Ayton School.](#)

My recollections of the school covers a period of roughly fifty years, and during that time many changes have taken place - changes coincident with the development and growth of the iron industry around us, and the agricultural decay. I recall the familiar scene of the boys working on the land in suitable attire; and the girls passing on to the Boarding House, that has been absorbed by the Girls' New Wing, for further instruction in housewifery. I am reminded of the position of the old bath-house as I pass along the road to Ayton Station; the Jubilee Block of buildings marks the fiftieth anniversary; and the present bath suggests the site of Mary Martin's tannery. [As previously explained, this must be Elizabeth \(Betsy\) Martin.](#)

When I wander through the beautiful grounds I am reminded of John Pease's remark to the first superintendent, "George, if people are not happy here, it is in them that ails them," for it is difficult to find a more beautiful setting for any institution.

The dietary was as follows:- ([this is taken directly from The History of Ayton School](#))

Breakfast	oatmeal porridge and milk
Dinner	Meat and potatoes, or pies and puddings alternately; Fish and potatoes occasionally instead of pies and puddings.
Supper	Bread and milk

The boys fed and milked the cows, and it is recorded that they were employed three hours a day each in making walks through the wood and by the side of the mill-dam leading to a bathing place in the river that has long been discarded.

Isaac Sharp was the first secretary to the Committee of management, and his optimism, natural attainments and cheerfulness of manner fitted him admirably for the post; he was followed by the scholarly William Jones, who continued in office until his removal to the south, to enter upon a peace propaganda with which his name will long be associated. He was succeeded by William Dodgson, a name not to be confused with William Dodshon, whose sudden death about a year ago caused the snapping of one of the few remaining links between the past and the present, but in his case his tenure of office was comparatively short. The duties pertaining to such a position carry much responsibility, but the earlier Committee were fortunate in being able to obtain the services of those who were keenly interested in the welfare of the institution.

The games that were played, and I refer to cricket and football, were associated with the low field, for the upper cricket ground had not yet come into existence; on it one of the best wickets that could be found in Cleveland could be prepared, for the prevailing moisture tended to make it easy paced and devoid of sting, but the bank that flanks it to the south was prejudicial to the accumulation of runs.

John Everett Hinchliffe was the first to give the game that stimulus that has carried it along so successfully to the outbreak of the present war, and with him runs the associated, a boy named Phillis Kirk, whose left-arm bowling and natural delivery attracted much attention at the time. He was undoubtedly one of the great bowlers that Ayton School has produced, and he should have gone far, had he felt disposed to continue the pastime.

It was natural that the bias in the direction of games should not find favour with some of the older members of the Committee whose environment had been more austere. At that particular time, music was totally banned, and the children who required instruction in pianoforte playing were sent to obtain it elsewhere. The management of the school reflected an earlier Quakerism, nevertheless there issued from it a number of scholars who made their mark in after years, they indicated in their rectitude, conduct, and outlook on life the beneficial training that they had received during the earlier days of the institution.

The members of the Committee did not allow the inconvenience arising from the want of railway facilities to interfere with their attendancies; and it was customary for them to drive from Middlesbro' until the opening of the Guisbro' extension, when Pinchinthorpe became the point of arrival and departure. The pressure of modern life was then unknown, hence they were able to devote more time to the consideration of the many problems incidental to the institution than is customary today. The General Meetings attracted a large number of Friends; and the High Green, we learn, was frequently covered by the conveyances of those who had arrived to take part, for it was a great Society function many years ago.

In the spring of last year I happened to be shown an old photograph of Esthill Peacock of Little Ayton, standing by the side of his premium Cleveland Bays, of which he was justly proud. The picture recalled some of the prominent Friends of Ayton Meeting who were wont to worship with him at that time. Thomas Wells is probably unknown even by name to the majority of the present congregation. He was a frail looking,

asthmatical, little man who punctuated his observations with the remark “I think I am safe in saying” for he was a prominent minister way back in the seventies.

William Jones, the gifted author of “Quaker Campaigns in Peace and War” was noted for his biblical knowledge, upon which he used to draw for the edification of the congregation.

Ralph Dixon, who became an acknowledged minister early in life, was commencing to share the burden of the Guisborough Monthly Meeting along with John Richardson of Langbaugh; his son, Henry; David Baker of Guisborough, the father of our friend of the same name, who is the last of an honoured race residing in that town; Jeremiah and Rachel Thistlethwaite; John and Louisa Dixon; George Dixon junior and his wife Martha Ann, and several other; and Elizabeth Ralph Dixon, whose concern for her monthly meeting was shared with her husband, was at the threshold of a ministry that appealed to her hearers by reason of its humility and by its unswerving allegiance to her Lord and Master.

I recall the stern visage John Richardson, the last of his race to reside at Langbaugh; and the palsied William Flounders whose head continued in perpetual motion throughout the services; it exerted a fascination to a new beholder, and as I used to sit and watch its regular movement, I often wondered how long it would be before it fell off!!

Old John Nellist, the father of the carrier, and a name associated with School Farm many years ago, used to appear in the orthodox collar-less coat and drab knee-breeches and gaiters. He exemplified in his costume a type of Cleveland farmer that has totally disappeared.

Then there was Willie Calvert, a farmer at Nunthorpe, who ended his days in our village not so long ago. He was a quaint character, and his views were decidedly original. There is a story told of him that is worthy of inclusion:-

About the time of the failure of J and J W Pease, that caused much consternation throughout the north of England, Ralph Dixon is reported to have paid him a religious visit, after a little conversation of a serious nature, the man drew it abruptly to a close with the remark “Why now, Ralph, I’ll tell thee what it is, I never dotted nobody in ma time, and that’s more than some of ye chaps can say.”

This, and several others come before me as I write, it is sufficient to add that the great contrast that existed between them and the modern type of Quaker, indicates the distance that we have travelled during the interval.

The school Christmas entertainments were of a very simple nature, theatrical displays were not allowed, the use of a stage was never suggested, and its accessories were quite out of the question, the music and dancing of a later time would have horrified our earlier Friends, hence the programmes centred around readings and recitations, but it is needful to add that they were excellently rendered.

Cricket, football and hockey matches at home and away were then unknown; the only school pursuits contained the study of botany and ornithology, with conchology also on the return of the first superintendent, George Dixon, from his labours among the Coloured People in the Southern States of America, for he has a great lover of nature in its varied forms, and transmitted his scientific bent of mind to later generations.

Ralph Dixon, the second superintendent, who retired just twenty-two years ago, comes within the scope of these notes. He was a typical schoolmaster of an age that has passed away; he was infused with the sentiments and aspirations of the founders, he successfully carried out the trust that was committed to him, and he in turn impressed his scholars with those high ideals, with which his period of office will be associated.

His biographical sketch in the Friends’ Annual Monitor 1917 refers to his having been an expert botanist, interested in natural history, astronomy, and kindred subjects, possessed of a fair knowledge of French, Latin,

and Hebrew; and he was also able to read the Bible in Norse. He was keenly interested in agriculture, in which he took his diploma, and his lectures on the subject that were delivered to the neighbouring Farmers' Clubs, and to the scholars under his care, were greatly valued by those who had the privilege of hearing them.

Then I reflect upon the Ayton School of my acquaintance, and recall the many changes that have taken place, it is borne in upon me that its pioneers laid a foundation that will remain for all time, for they built in permanent material.

4th January 1918

REGARDING OLD LANDMARKS

The Stokesley Rural District Council and its governing body, the North Riding County Council, have been recently engaged in overhauling the bridges which come within their jurisdiction, owing to the increasing weight of the traffic that they have to support. It has resulted in the removal, or alteration of, several old landmarks that we would gladly have retained, for their disappearance has caused a void that cannot be filled.

The authorities are more concerned with the present than with the past, for they are present creations! They build for posterity, and they aim at durability rather than picturesqueness, hence the bridges of today cannot compare in beauty of outline with their predecessors. This is an age of cheapness of construction, the arch has given place to horizontal lines, stone to cement and ferro-concrete, and the solid approaches to tubular railing.

It mattered little how ugly the structure may be so long as it meets the requirements of the times. It is probable that the Romans were the first bridge-builders in this country of ours, but their object was strategic, viz: the passage of troops from one district to another. As time moved on we are led to conclude that the monks took up the work, but in their case the reason was different, their bridges were required to connect up the monastic houses that were scattered over the land. The learned author of 'The England of Shakespeare' tells us that "they were narrow and not intended for vehicular traffic, but for the passage of pack-horses and riders."

In process of time the great coaching era arrived and a fresh impetus was given to the construction of such, although Macadam had yet to appear to revolutionise the surface of the turnpikes, over which the increasing traffic passed. It was customary for those who had to undertake a journey to make their wills in advance, for danger lurked in the deep ruts and the prospect of being held up by a band of highwaymen which infested the roads about that time, was ever present in their minds.

With the arrival of the railway era conditions changed again, the traffic commenced to flow in other channels, and the roads became neglected. It occurs to the writer that a bridge is an historical piece of information for it tells us so many things, if we examine it with care. There is the dressing of the stone from which a builder will determine its approximate age; the formation of the figures indicating the date is of very great value for the purpose of comparison; its width tells us about the extent of the traffic that was expected to pass over it; and the height of the arch the volume of water that would pass under it in time of flood.

There are those bridges whose date of erection is known, but there are a great many of which we know nothing with certainty, and the bridge at Great Ayton belongs to the latter class; nevertheless, we have the material at hand from which to form a rough idea, for it is recorded that its approaches were committed to the care of Parson Hastwell, Nicholas Richardson, and Thomas Weatherill, and that Mr Justice Wilson subscribed £7:7:0 towards the cost! As Nicholas Richardson was born in 1730, and Mr Justice Wilson died in 1795, it is probable that the date of its erection would be found to be between 1750 and 1795. It happens, however, that there is an old stone built into the north east approach, and the date that is carved upon it is 1775, but whether it refers to the bridge or the approaches it is impossible to say.

Bartle Bridge is another illustration, and in this case the date is 1820, but when the structure was examined during the course of its removal during the early summer of this year to have been built at twice. There was abundant evidence that the original bridge had been much narrower than the one that was being removed, for it had been added to on either side. It became clear that the date 1820 referred to the year in which the widening had taken place, and not to the date of the original building.

The first bridge to be placed across the Leven at Little Ayton was erected by Esthill Peacock, who resided in the farm-house now occupied by Thomas Petch, it was little better than a temporary structure but its artistic properties were far in advance of the modern one; and it required constantly repairing to keep it safe for the farm traffic that passed over it. I can well remember how we used to speculate upon our chances of getting

across it with safety, and our frequent crossing of the ford when it looked too insecure, for it was a very primitive affair at the best!

The traveller who goes securely over the Ayton branch line on his way to Guisbro, can observe the remains of the old road below the north east embankment, for it followed the level of the ground until the arrival of the railway; and, further on, he can follow the line of the turnpike at Pinchinthorpe Station that was superseded at the opening of the new station many years ago.

The lanes around Ayton were noted for the wild roses that grew in profusion and that caused them to be extremely beautiful, for the hedges were allowed to grow wild; but the laying that has taken place in later years has diminished the number to the regret of those lovers of nature who were in the habit of enjoying their gorgeous expanse. When I recall those straggling old hedges, that have been once more cut into shape, I am apt to speculate upon their age, for the passage of time appears to make very little difference in their appearance. Those gnarled old stumps that give life to the younger shoots seem to defy the blasts of winter, or the burning rays of a summer sun; they continued to exist very much in the same condition as they did in the days of my boyhood.

It happens by chance that the writer came across a piece of information that threw a flood of light upon the antiquity of such. It was in the form of a carefully prepared sketch plan, in a bundle of old deeds, and it referred to the planting of two new hedges about one hundred years ago. These particular hedges look absolutely modern when compared with the older ones around them, and so we are led to conclude that the older ones date back a very long way, and that they were either planted or left to form the divisions between fields when nature was being brought into subjection for the use of man.

6th January 1918

THE RISE OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN G^T AYTON

We have already gleaned something regarding the growth of elementary education in the village of Great Ayton, for reference has been made to the benefactions of Michael Postgate in a previous chapter. It is useful to also remember that Humphreys Anderson conducted a school in which navigation was taught, for Great Ayton was in the habit of sending a number of men to Whitby every year to engage in the whale fishing industry with which that port was associated, but as the fees were 7^d per week they would probably be beyond the capacity of the labouring classes. [Humphrey Sanderson was the teacher, but Henry's writing was very clear as Humphreys Anderson. Perhaps he had heard the name rather than reading it, in which case the odd spelling is understandable.](#)

It is evident, however, that the facilities provided were no longer capable of meeting the growing demand for we learn that on 14th December 1842 a decision was arrived at, at a meeting held under the chairmanship of John Richardson, of Langbaugh, to erect British Schools to be conducted on the plans of the British and Foreign Society for the education of 50 boys and 50 girls, which Thomas Richardson proposed to endow with four shares in the Stockton and Darlington Railway. This generosity was recorded in the following minute:

“That the proposal of Thomas Richardson Esq be thankfully accepted, and a subscription be forthwith entered into for the purpose of defraying the expenses of such site and buildings.”

The rules regulating the admission of pupils permitted their acceptance “without regard to sectarian prejudices”, and the preamble enlarged upon this aspect in the following words:

“While it teaches the doctrines and precepts of religion from the page of divine inspiration itself, it excluded creeds and catechisms, and thus occupying the ground of our Common Christianity, it sets as a powerful auxiliary to Sabbath School instruction, and leaves untouched the formularies and disciplines of particular churches.” [Up to this time the Sunday Schools attached to individual churches had been the only form of widely-available, free education](#)

It is needful to add at this point that the school buildings were vested in one set of Trustees, and that the Thomas Richardson endowment was vested in another; and that the same principle is in force today; but the management of the school devolved upon the former body, an arrangement, with some modifications as to local representation, that is still in force.

At the time of my becoming a member of the former Trust the original system was still in force; and the income was derived from three sources viz:-

From the proceeds of the endowment

From the children's payment

From parish subscriptions

Then we entered upon the era of the grant in aid, but after a few years of this hazardous arrangement free education came to the fore, and the North Riding Education Department took over the financing of the school. It relieved the Committee of management, but it opened up the consideration of the utilization of the endowment, for it is obvious that it was no longer required to assist in running the school. Negotiations were entered into between the Committee of Management and the Board of Education, and an arrangement was arrived at by which the former body was to be allowed to retain £20 a year towards the upkeep of the fabric, and the balance was to be employed in providing scholarships under the name of “The Thomas Richardson Foundation Scholarship”. This step necessitated the formation of a Scholarship Committee to be appointed as under:

Four Representative Trustees to be appointed as to two by the North Riding County Council, and as to two by the Great Ayton Parish Council; and four Co-optative Trustees to be appointed (except at first as in this scheme provided by resolution of the Trustees.

The first Co-optative Trustees “to hold office for their respective lives being:-

Sir John Pease Fry, Bart, Cleveland Lodge, Great Ayton

Alfred Edward Kitching, of The Firs, Great Ayton

Henry Kitching, of The Grange, Great Ayton

Jonathan Edward Hodgkin, of Shelleys, Darlington.

The rules regulating the granting of such Scholarships embrace

Residence

Age

Previous education

Duration

Amount

Forfeiture

Examination

And the first examination was conducted by Herbert Dennis B Sc in the summer of 1916, the successful candidate being Bert Wilson, and Ayton lad, who entered the Friends’ School under the provisions of the Scholarship in the autumn term of that year.

The opening of the Edward Kitching County Elementary School in 1908 caused a rearrangement of the children attending the British and Marwood Schools, the former becoming an infants’ school for the village, and with the alteration it was considered expedient to appoint a Ladies Visiting Committee which has done excellent work since its creation.

At the time of my appointment as a Trustee thirty-five years ago our meetings were held in the Postgate School Room; John Peacock of Ayton, a well-to-do miller, was the Chairman, and the other members were Henry Richardson of Hambleton Hills, Nunthorpe, Doctor William Augustus Loy and H C H Jackson of Beech Grove, Great Ayton, James Emerson of Easby Hall, Jonathan B Hodgkin and Theodore Fry both of Darlington, Thomas Eeles, a retired farmer residing in the village, William Harbottle, who was appointed to the Chair some years later, with Ralph Dixon as Honorary Correspondent.

Sectarian differences were apt to creep in, and wrangling was not infrequent; it was James Emerson’s habit to raise a debate upon a technical flaw, such as the omission of the agenda to the notices calling the meetings, and Doctor Loy was frequently ready to assist in any obstruction. We could hardly be called a happy family for politics had an unseemly way of introducing themselves! Those days have totally disappeared, for the obstructionists departed many years ago, and peace, perfect peace, overshadows our deliberations.

William Harbottle was a valuable member, his professional knowledge was of very great value, he had great force of character and was possessed of much independence of thought, and his ruling from the Chair was the opposite of that of John Peacock’s; that was, charitably speaking, exceedingly weak.

Thomas Eeles’s disposition drove him in the direction of least resistance, while Henry Richardson, on the other hand, was always ready for a fight!

But my thoughts centre chiefly round the great, though unostentatious, work that Ralph Dixon accomplished during his 50 years of devoted service. He retained an unruffled demeanour during those earlier stormy sittings, he guided our deliberations with remarkable judgement at a time of much educational difficulty, and he navigated the British School into smooth water before his retirement became an accomplished fact. The Committee of Management in recognition of his long and valuable services presented him with an honorarium in the form of a cheque.

He was succeeded by James L Barker, B SC, the Senior Assistant Master at the Friends' School.

In 1851 the Marwood, or Church Schools, were erected, with which the name of William Hunter is inseparably connected, for the work that he accomplished in moulding the characters of the children that passed through his hands will constitute a permanent memorial of his lofty ideals. When I think of William Hunter I am reminded of his great interest in the Great Ayton University Education Society, whose work is at present in abeyance on account of the war. A student by nature, he was ever on the alert to keep himself abreast of the times, and his well-stored mind and scholarly attainments impressed all those who had the privilege of his acquaintance.

His mantle appears to have fallen upon the shoulders of J H Cooper, the new master of the Edward Kitching County Elementary School. He is a man of unbounded energy, and his educational ideals, and personal influence are a great asset to the village.

10th January 1918

EARLIER RESIDENCES. TEM^P 1818

The village of Great Ayton has grown very considerably during the last one hundred years by reason of the mining for whin and ironstone that has been developed within that period, that has superseded the older industries of alum working, weaving and tanning; but it is a curious fact that although it is within easy reach of Teesside, the number of larger residences that have been erected is exceedingly low.

It is just possible that the want of a proper water supply, sanitation, and lighting by gas or electricity may have contributed to the cause, but the unusual geographical features of the village form an element in their consideration, for although they add greatly to its picturesqueness, they limit the suitable sites, and place those that are suitable beyond the reach of our modern requirements, for the laying of gas and water mains is liable to be costly, and the local authority is liable to step in where sanitation has to be dealt with.

Village life has its disadvantages: it is unsuited to the great mass of the population by reason of its limitations. It is essentially agrarian for the land reaches up to our doors; there are the long winter nights that drive us indoors, and that throw us back upon our own resources; our lanes are devoid of artificial light; there are no well laid pavements upon which we can walk with ease and comfort; our railway communication is limited, and even the modern motor-bus is an uncertain mode of conveyance, for it is very susceptible to climatic conditions, and cannot be found when most in request!

It appears to the writer that unless there is a natural love for the land, and an interest in those who are engaged in its cultivation; for the change of the seasons and their own particular treatment; and a knowledge of agricultural operations that pertain to each, we are apt to lose the full value of a residence in the country; for picture shows, concerts, and other entertainments flavour of the town.

Village life is distinctly communal - and this is a condition that is apt to be overlooked - the microscope is always at work in our examination, our neighbours take a deep and abiding interest in our affairs, of which they appear to know as much as ourselves, and they estimate our worth by their own peculiar standards!

So it comes about that those who cannot sympathise with all that is going on around them, by reason of their limitations, are unable to fit into their new environment, and hence they become disillusioned, and pass away!

As I reflect upon these roughly sketched suggestions, the thought that passes through my mind is:- how does it occur that so many people will risk a residence in the country with which they are entirely out of touch?

To return, however, to the object of our enquiry, let us proceed to Langbaugh and try and ascertain some information about it. We should find Willie Richardson residing at Old Langbaugh - the obdurate old gentleman who refused to change his wet clothing - and his son, John, a young fellow of 23, who, about the time of his marriage with Jane Proctor of North Shields, was sorely perplexed regarding the site of his new home. He decided upon New Langbaugh, or the present Langbaugh Hall, in preference to Ayton Grange, according to the words of his son, Henry, who in later years farmed the land there. Willie's younger brother, Henry, referred to as of Ayton and Stockton, had a house in the village but it has been difficult to hit upon. It has at last been discovered in the house at present occupied by widow and daughter of Emanuel Easton, and it is the quaint old ivy-clad building that stands by the Low Ford. My authority is a member of the Richardson family, and the position corresponds with the description in Henry Richardson's will.

The house near the stone bridge, now in the occupation of our versatile cab proprietor, A Dunning, was the vicarage, and it would be the earlier residence of the reverend Joseph Ibbetson M A, a clergyman of the old school, who held the living in 1833, from 1827 to 1878. He retired to Darlington, and dying in 1887 was buried beside his wife in the Ayton Old Church Yard, for she had pre-deceased him about 9 years.

Doctor Loy, the father of Doctor Loy of the British School repute, would probably be found living at the present Beech Grove, for he died in 1842, and has practiced in the village for over forty years; and the Heseltons would be residing in the house on the High Green, now occupied by Herbert Dennis B Sc and his wife and family. It is recorded of them ([the Heselton brothers](#)) that they were lovers of the chase, and delighted in their greyhounds; as also did Thomas Backhouse of Darlington, an earlier Chairman of Lloyds, whose instinct for the sport was regretfully commented upon by a brother Quaker in the following words:- “Thomas Backhouse keepeth dogs” with much emphasis on the last word.

I am unable to fix upon the occupant of the house on High Green, the home of our valued village doctor, Charles Stuart, but it is probable that it was inhabited by Mary Martin, the prosperous tanner, whose business premises were scattered around.

Thomas Graham would probably be residing at Ayton Hall; but there is no information touching on occupancy of the Manor House, unless a member of the Richardson family resided in it, for it formed part of (the past) property included in the will of Henry Richardson, who, as has already been noted, was the Lord of the Manor at that particular time. Nor is there any information forthcoming regarding Ayton House, the dower-house to the Hall ([a dower house was a moderately large house on an estate occupied by the widow of the late owner](#))

The history of Ayton Grange carried us back to the days of the Skottowes for an inscription was found at the time of the first alteration of 1893-4 that ran as follows:- “Justice Skottowe = 1757”. The property was sold by that family to Henry Richardson in 1806, and the memorandum of agreement states that it was in the occupancy of Peter Donaldson, farmer, the great grandfather of John Hnery Donaldson of Angrove East Farm, Great Ayton, whose family is being educated at the Friends’ School.

The association existing between Ayton Grange and the ghost of Angrove Hall recalls the tragedy that brought about the demolition of the latter residence, and the removal of the stone bridge that spanned the River Leven, to The Grange; but those who are interested in the supernatural can still trace the line of the defaced carriage drive and the remains of the once haunted house, in their walk through the fields to the market town of Stokesley.

It will be observed that Cleveland lodge, Undercliffe, Bye-Moor, High Fields, the Bungalow, and Herdholt do not come within our survey. They belong to a later period that is outside the scope of this article, hence their omission. It will be noted that these residences, wit the exception of Old Langbaugh and Ayton Grange, were to be found within the village, nevertheless the later houses that sprang up around have added to its amenities, for the timber ([tree plantations](#)) with which they are enclosed contributes greatly to its appearance, and lends a distinction that might otherwise be wanting. The village of Great Ayton is fortunate in its amenities, and its wealth of timber and unusual formation, attributable to the course of the River Leven, entitle it to the appellation of “one of the beauty spots in Cleveland”.

14th January 1918

TEMPORA MUTANTUR

“THE TIMES ARE PERPETUALLY CHANGING AND WE WITH THE TIMES”

We are living in an age of great social progress, the morning and evening papers are read with avidity; our village is supplied with several postal deliveries; we can converse by phone, or telegraph to the four corners of the earth; we can shop by post, or use the railway or motor-bus if we wish to patronize the better-filled shops in the neighbouring towns; and our politics are prepared for our own consumption by the leader writers, for we are losing the power of thinking for ourselves! In effect, our environment is rapidly expanding.

All this may be counted as so much to the good, but there is an old saying and it is this, “What one gains in dancing one loses in turning round” and if we apply the idea to our consideration of this particular aspect it comes to this, that we have gained on the one hand and have lost on the other. In what direction have we suffered?

We have suffered in observation, memorizing, and in our ability to form our own conclusions. When I recall the old Aytonian I am reminded of a totally different type of man. There was something about him that riveted our attention. He was tinged with superstition, although it was not apt to appear upon the surface. He had great powers of observation, and his scholastic deficiencies were made up to him by the possession of a wonderful memory that retained everything that attracted his attention. The village was the centre of his thoughts; he knew everything about it, its ownership, its history, its occupations and its gossip. Our elementary education is designed to turn children out exactly alike, it discourages originality, they must all conform to one pattern and the rules and regulations of the Board of Education permit of no elasticity, they are like the Laws of the Medes and Persians in their rigidity. (the Book of Daniel refers to “the Laws of the Medes and Persians which altereth not”) Hence originality “goes by the board”, and we aim at turning out the finished articles as alike as two peas!

Many years ago, originality was rife, one met it at every corner; it is now very rarely to be found, and its absence is attributable to the causes already enumerated. I should like to depict two or three of these curious individuals with whom I used to come in contact many years ago but the pen is a poor medium for the purpose, it cannot produce the local colouring, dialect and originality that are the necessary concomitants.

I remember Willie Bayles perfectly well, and I have good reason, for he courted two young women at the same time, and was never quite satisfied in his own mind if his selection for the future Mrs was the right one! The two aspiring persons were maids at Ayton Firs, so it frequently happened that one came across the trio, for he walked them out, unblushingly, together! A little time before his death, he was prevailed upon to make his will, which is a very proper thing to do, and in referring to the act to a neighbour is reported to have said:- “Dost thou know, David, a’ve just made ma will, and a’ve forgotten to leave a penny piece to messel, yan is foxed when yan’s poorly”.

The rubicund countenance of Robert Jackson “Cobbler Bob” appears before me as I write, he was the Friends’ School shoemaker for a great number of years, and it may be said of him that he never had an enemy. Robert was a great supporter of the Church, but one Sunday evening, some years ago, I met him out walking into Yarm back lane. On enquiring of him how it happened that he was not in church he assumed a dignified air and replied with a twinkle in his eye, “Ah’s yan o’t quality I nobbut gans in a forenoon”. It was a sly hit at the custom of his “betters” as he would have called them.

Who does not remember William Swallow, the road repairer of a previous decade? He was steeped in superstition, very observant, and was gifted in repartee. Some young fellows out of a neighbouring town happened to find him pursuing his calling, stringing a piece of road to throw the traffic out of the ruts that had been made, and after watching him for some time one of them asked him, with the view of “pulling his leg”, “How long does it take you to wheel a barrow full of stones from one side of the road to the other?” but the only

reply he received was “That depends”. Having failed in their effort to draw the old man they were on the point of departing when he stopped them with the remark “That reminds me, there’s an Italian organ-grinder been down here searchin’ for his monkey that he’s lost - I’ll award it one of you!!” It was his habit of saying that the foolish interscriptions that he met with on the high roads from people who might know better caused him to become “brazzend enough for ought”.

It is not so long ago since old Robert Barker of Little Ayton died “by hissen” in accordance with his desire, but a few hours before the end he was visited by a neighbour to whom he unburdened his mind “Ay, John” he is reported to have said, “I ‘ave been ill, I pray to t’ Lord to tak me, but he wouldn’t ‘ave me”. To which the neighbour responded with the view of encouraging the invalid “Why, Robert, thou’t not reet colour for the cemetery yet”.

Some forty years ago there resided in the village a very lively curate, whose name shall be nameless, at the time of his residence the great commercial depression that set in towards the end of the seventies was playing havoc with the industries on Teesside, and one firm followed another into liquidation, for they collapsed like a pack of cards. Our cleric jumped at the opportunity that presented itself, and is reported to have delivered six consecutive sermons on the bankruptcy laws to the great annoyance of some of his congregation, whose firms were offering their creditors a trifle in the pound. Mightily pleased at the success of his discourses he proceeded to find another outlet for his unusual activity, but in this case he sought it in nonconformity. At the time of which we are thinking, a series of revival services were being held at one of the chapels, which the nonagenarian, old John Harbottle, was in the habit of attending. He was an important man among the Body and one who was gifted with the power of public utterance. During one of the services he was called upon to engage in prayer, but it so happened that he had not arrived, and that only his son, William, was in the chapel. A pause ensued, and again the voice repeated:- “Brother Harbottle will now engage in prayer”. As the eyes of the congregation rested in expectancy upon the son he is reported to have risen from his seat in his agitation, and to have made the following astounding explanation. “No sir, no sir, it’s not me that prays, it’s my father that prays - I never pray”. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the story, but I recall the amusement it gave to William Harbottle, and how his ample frame used to shake with laughter when he was twitted ([taunted in good humour](#)) with his prayerless proclivities.

One more story, and then we must proceed to another subject. John Petch of Little Broughton, a Yorkshire farmer well-known in his day for his originality and humour, was making his way to Stokesley on foot “dressed in his best” which was very unusual for him, but it happened to be the Rent-Audit and he wished to appear “well put upon” for the occasion. On meeting an acquaintance he was asked the reason for his dapper appearance, to which he replied “Whisht, it’s our rent day. The acquaintance followed it up with the remark “Well, I suppose if you pay with one hand, you will want a bit back in the other” (a custom, be it said, that continues today). “Why, of course”, was John’s reply, “one allus looks for summat”. Knowing his man well, the acquaintance rejoined:- “How in the world can you expect anything returned with a brand new suit of clothes on passes my comprehension”. For once in his life John was quite nonplussed. He looked up and down the road, as he was just at the outskirts of Stokesley, while he debated in his mind what he ought to do, and then recovering himself shouted out “By gocks, if I’d happen thought of it I wouldn’t ‘ave put ‘em on, but it’s ower far to go back and change”.

17th January 1918

THE OLD FLOUR MILLS OF GREAT AYTON AND WHAT BEFELL THEM

We are witnessing a great agricultural revolution. It has been brought about by the present war. Under the powers of the Defence of the Realm Act the surveyors have been visiting the farms for the purpose of selecting the grass land that has to be ploughed out. The face of the country is to be changed, and Cleveland is to take its part in the production of corn, along with the rest of Great Britain. This is a case of necessity, and necessity knows no law for, in the words of Lloyd George, "the plough is our hope."

It happens, however, that history has a habit of repeating itself; it cropped up in the Derby Recruiting Scheme, as those who have studied the Militia Acts know too well. It reappears in the ploughing out orders, for the same thing occurred in the Reign of Good Queen Bess. My authority tells us that up to that time every one was busy in the production of those useful fleeces which brought so much wealth to England, and lined the pockets of the merchants and agriculturalists. All the land was given to grazing, and the farmers cared not for ploughing and sowing when they found that keeping sheep was more profitable. But in the special period we are studying rural affairs were altered. English wool declined in price as it did in quality; wheat rose in value from six shillings a quarter in Henry VIII's time to thirty eight shillings in that of the later years of Queen Elizabeth. An extensive system of enclosures set in. Acts of Parliament were passed ordering that pasture land should be turned into tillage and that no arable land should be laid down to grass. It is obvious that the corn would require milling to render it suitable for human and bovine consumption, hence it would lead to the springing up of the country mills that abounded many years ago.

In the days of my boyhood, Great Ayton contained three of these.

- 1 There was the High Mill that has since become the Friends' School laundry, electric light plant house, and demonstration room, in which the lowest class receives instruction.
- 2 The mill that has been more recently absorbed by the Great Ayton Gas Company, and
- 3 That at Ayton Grange. The last named is the only survivor for, as we have just seen, the other two have disappeared.

When we come to consider the amount of money that has been expended in their construction, in their machinery, and in the making of their dams, races and sluices, and note the excellence and strength of the work, we can glean something of their importance in earlier times. When I wander up the village by the side of the race, and rest my eyes on the solidly constructed High Dam ([a correction to Low Dam makes it obvious it is the dam in Waterfall Park](#)) I often speculate upon the name of the builder. ([Thomas Richardson's initials were carved on the east wall of the dam after he rebuilt it following the floods of 1840. It seems Henry Kitching was unaware of this.](#))

The Ayton Grange Mill is an illustration. A hundred years ago we find it employed in the production of oil cake, and the sound of its stampers resounded through the village, but in the year 1859 the last load of cake was drawn out of it in the bullock wagon of the Earl of Feversham and the industry came to an end. It remained idle for some years, and then it was utilized for the preparation of foundry loam but the business quickly collapsed, and the mill fell upon evil days. During the 27 years terminating with 1908, the mill has been occupied by five different tenants; the first tried his hand at tanning, and I remember the bark pits of thirty years ago; his successor who appears to have held it at a nominal rent put it to very little use. The next two were millers, but they did not prosper, and the last employed it for other purposes.

The disappearance of the Middle Mill in 1912, through its purchase by the Great Ayton Gas Company, has had the effect of giving it a new lease of life, for it is now the last survivor to meet the requirements of the farmers around it. We know not what may be in store for it, but the ploughing out of the grass land, to which reference has already been made, may probably bring it a considerable increase of business. It was the habit before the war to look upon these country mills as relics of a bye-gone age; their weather-beaten quaint exteriors were apt to charm the artistic eye; their rudely fashioned interiors were the delight of the archaeologist, who revelled in

their primitive construction, and their massive water-ways attracted the attention by reasons of their strength and durability; but of their usefulness there was apparently little!

The scene has changed! The old mills are coming once more 'by their own' and they will play an important part in the great agricultural revolution that is taking place around them.

19th January 1918

VILLAGE CRICKET

Henry wrote a separate article, entirely on cricket, which will be transcribed later. His absorption with the game, and his abiding interest in Great Ayton cricket, come across in both of these articles.

I apprehend that those who have had the privilege of taking part in inter-village cricket will agree with me in the assertion that it is brim-full of keenness and incident. There is nothing like it to be found elsewhere, for the issues are of vast importance. The players are entrusted with the credit of the hamlet, and hence play "for all they are worth". The villages dotted over the Vale of Cleveland have been the home of the game for a very long period of time, and they have produced many excellent players, men who took part in the greater cricket around them, and whose deeds are still referred to with unbounded admiration, for there were giants in those far-off days!

?? Stockdale was one of these, he was the possessor of wonderful physical powers, and his hitting was reputed to have been prodigious.

Village cricket has its ups and downs, for it does not follow that one generation of players will be as skilled in the game as the one that preceded it, for it frequently happens that the demand is in excess of the supply. The game is an exacting master! It demands enthusiasm, natural ability, observation, and skill, and unless there is plenty of the first named to act as the motive power, the other three are of little avail.

It is not my purpose to refer to the origin of the game for it is outside the purpose of these notes. My object is to refer to the pastime as it appealed to me a quarter of a century ago, and to revive some of the scraps of information that reached me regarding some of the earlier players in the village. It may be said without contradiction that village cricket depends upon its bowlers for its success, for good wickets are required to make good batsmen, and the grounds upon which the aspirants play are usually rough and uncertain. They tend to develop a number of unorthodox strokes that are used in self-defence, and they become - like bad habits - difficult to eradicate.

The game has found its home in the Church Field, at Ayton Grange, and California at one time and another, but it is difficult to hit upon their exact dates, although I seem to have a hazy idea that matches were played at The Grange in the seventies and in a field in California in the following decade, but we know that in the nineties it returned to the former.

Great Ayton has been fortunate in the number of its great bowlers, who carried their team to victory time after time. An earlier generation used to speak with admiration of the wonderful trio Joe Wilson, Tom Heaviside and John William Hauxwell, for they spread destruction within the ranks of their opponents. The last named was the fastest, Heaviside was very straight and accurate, but Wilson was cleverest with the ball. Then came that sterling player Charlie Haswell, and the gifted Herbert Heaviside, and right well did they sustain the traditions of the past. The former will be remembered for his remarkable length and pace, and the latter for his speed and for his persistent attack upon the leg stump.

In process of time, Tom Pearson appeared upon the scene, and it is doubtful if Ayton ever produced a more difficult bowler. I can still see his springy run up to the wicket, the body movement, and his wrist work that imparted much "devil" to the ball. His pace was slow medium, but the eccentricity of the ball off the pitch was the cause of his success. He could bump on a soft wicket and shoot on a hard one, so the batsman lived in a state of uncertainty. With him were associated Dick Heaviside, the handyman, who could bat, bowl, and field anywhere, with distinction; the amiable Jack Brown of doubtful delivery, and a very steady and painstaking bat; and poor Ben Wilkinson, whose career ended all too soon. The first named was liable to overpitch, but he had a swerver in his repertoire that was very deadly when it came. Brown was usually straight and kept a good length, and Ben Wilkinson used to bowl that impossible ball that pitched on the leg stump and would take off the bail. When the author saw it arriving he instinctively felt that the batsman had received his notice to quit!

Robert Graham was another very good bowler, and his high, dropping deliveries, to which he imparted considerable finger-spin, were very effective. He collected his annual sheaf of wickets with unflinching regularity; but our engagement at Middlesbrough brought about the termination of his career, so far as Ayton was concerned, when he was at the top of his form. The Club never possessed a more willing cricketer, nor one whose heart was more in the game.

With him may be suitably included that very useful player, Chris Jackson. He was a good all round man whose successful batting stands out in my memory. He was a capital man to open an innings, for his defence was very sound and he was careful to give nothing away. Chris was something of an experimentalist with the ball, but he could bowl remarkably well nevertheless, although the majority of his great feats were performed for the Second Eleven. When he and Robert Graham were its stock bowlers their opponents were up against a tough proposition.

I remember an extraordinary individual who was known by the name of "Boxer" Wilkinson, although I believe his Christian name was Tom. He might be called a mystical cricketer, for his idiosyncrasies stood in the way of his giving of his best. There is no doubt but that he was a good bowler of the old-fashioned under the level of the shoulder type, that caused the ball to work in from leg, but through some obscure perversity we rarely saw the real man, and so he gradually disappeared.

Another era witnessed the arrival of Frank Bottomley, Jonathan Bishop the professional, and Robert Davison the left-hander, the nephew of that sterling old cricketer, Watson Davison, of whom I hope to say a few words later on, and to whom I am indebted for much of the earlier information. The first named (Frank Bottomley) was very straight and kept that awkward length from which it was difficult to score with freedom - the professional, as was to be expected, was remarkably consistent and could bowl a surprisingly fast ball for so slight a man; and Davison was frequently very effective in spite of a little want of head and self control, that caused him at times to be a little wild. Nevertheless he possessed all the attributes of a good bowler, for he had an easy and natural delivery, and any amount of strength. In later years he became a professional, and the knowledge that he obtained in better class cricket brought his powers to full fruition.

WICKET KEEPERS

My cricket career covered a period of roughly thirty-five years, and during the whole of it, it was my misfortune to be required to hang around the wicket. I commenced as a long stop, ended as a wicket keeper - there were occasions, of course, when I got a day off for an afternoon's enjoyment in another position, but they came very seldom. It may be taken for granted that an old wicket-keeper should know something of his craft, and it will be conceded by those who know the game that wicket-keepers are difficult to find, and the reason arises from the fact that they are born and not made! I am quite at a loss to explain the phenomenon, but it is so, nevertheless.

Good wickets and good batsmen make good wicket-keepers, and it must be added that good length bowling is a sine qua non. Given the three, and the keeper is out for a good time; a fumbling batsman and an erratic bowler mean a pair of damaged hands - there is no possible escape. The poor custodian is "in the cart", and he knows it.

In my earlier days, the wicket-keeper stood up to the wicket irrespective of the pace of the bowling, and much of the work devolved upon the long stop, for legging was unknown, but as time moved on, the wicket-keeper stood back to the pace bowling and so the long stop was not required. I remain in doubt as to the efficacy of the latter custom, for it gives a quick-footed batsman the opportunity for playing outside the crease. There is an erroneous and firmly-rooted impression that wicket-keepers dislike fast bowling. It is a fallacy. Pace has no terrors provided that the length is alright. What a wicket-keeper objects to is a faulty pitch, and an uneven paced ground.

The most difficult man to whom I kept wicket was Tom Pearson, I never knew where he was to be found, his bowling jumped about irrespective of the state of the wicket, and kept me always on the stretch. Jonathan Bishop was just the reverse, one knew instinctively where he would arrive, and the hands went mechanically to the spot. Keeping for Jonathan was a positive joy, for he was consistency personified. They represent to me the two extremes.

The bad batsman is always a source of annoyance, uncertain of himself, and can easily be a source of danger for he is apt to play in two minds, and the wicket-keeper is usually not endowed with second sight! The good old-fashioned country slogger was perfectly charming to keep to, he either got the ball well into the middle of the bat or missed it altogether; there was nothing half-hearted about his play for he aimed at laying on the wood.

I have seen it stated that if a wicket-keeper can take, on an average, one out of every three chances he is doing all that can be expected of him. The spectators, however, are apt to think otherwise and they are liable to resent every lost opportunity. When one considers the fraction of time that passes in the progress of the ball between the batsman and the wicket-keeper it is surprising to me that the latter succeeds as well as he does, for the deflection of the ball increases in relation to the distance, and the adjustment has to be made. I have caught men wide of the wicket, I know not how for it is pure guess work, and I have caught them off the batting glove when the touch was so slight that it escaped the keen eyes of the umpire.

There is another aspect that fills me with astonishment, and it is the length of time that a wicket-keeper usually lasts. He is the donkey of the eleven, he comes in for all the hard work, he gets all the rough usage, his hands are frequently knocked up, yet he takes his place with unflinching regularity, and rarely requires a rest. The bowler gets a rest after each over, and he can be taken off at the discretion of the captain, but the custodian of the wicket is expected to retain his place, crouching in an unnatural and tiring position, throughout the long drawn out innings, with the rays of a summer sun hitting him squarely on the back of the neck, and all the time he is expected to take the chances that come his way as a matter of course, and to keep down the extras!

The wicket-keeper is the centre of the eleven around which the team revolves, but he receives precious little credit for all his arduous and exacting work, and it arises from the fact that the average spectator does not appreciate his difficult task. It is only when we put on the gloves and try our apprentice hand that we begin to realize all that is entailed. When I ponder upon his willingly accepted duty, his labour, the knocks that he receives, and the responsibility that rests upon him, it surprises me not that there are so few of his craft, but that there are any at all!

Country bowlers suffer from one defect; they do not bowl sufficiently to their field, they seem to overlook the fact that there are ten men ready and willing to assist them if only they have the chance, but they bowl persistently at the wicket regardless of their opportunities.

I have written rather fully on wicket-keeping with the view of bringing out some of the points about which too little is known, for the keeper is in a class by himself, and he belongs to a very restricted trade, but it is time to proceed from the general to the particular and refer to those who did duty for Ayton.

William Heaviside, or "Old William" as he was affectionately called in later years, was one of the earliest, and he kept for Ayton in the days of the celebrated trio; it was no easy task to take the bowling of the fiery John William Hauxwell, but he had the assistance of a very safe long stop in Richard Carlen, who was noted for his quick return to the wickets, so the extras were well kept down on the whole.

He was succeeded by William Winn, the quarry master, who was equally proficient. He played a good deal of touring cricket and had the unfortunate and lamentable experience of receiving into his outstretched arms a batsman who was instantaneously killed at the crease by a blow on the head from a very fast ball delivered by J M Preston, the Yorkshire County cricketer. [\(Preston, who played for Yeadon and Yorkshire, took 9 for 28 against the MCC in 1888\)](#)

In the process of time George Wicks appeared on the scene, and it is our habit of thought to regard him as the greatest exponent that the village has produced. George was wonderfully quick and neat at the wicket, and kept with remarkable skills until the effect of his occupation diminished the keenness of his sight, for he worked in the whinstone mines.

In this list must be included Watson Davison, the cheeriest of cricketers, who would willingly take any place in the field, and whose batting was frequently very successful. He was a great lover of the noble game, and gave it ungrudgingly of his best. He kept up his cricket well into middle life, and even at the end of his career continued to be a very capable stumper.

The fielding was usually sound and the catching good on the whole, and there times when it was positively brilliant. The President of the Club in the nineties, A E Kitching ([Alfred Edward Kitching was Henry's brother](#)) was a great short slip - he had a long reach, a pair of effective hands, and his enthusiasm was contagious. Herbert Heaviside made an excellent point; his cousin, Dick, and poor Ben Wilkinson could field anywhere with equal distinction, and Henry Taylor, who left us early in his career to push his fortune in the Colonies, used to make some wonderful catches at long leg. The batting was the weak point, but there were some sterling batsman, nevertheless. An older generation used to speak with pride and admiration of the deeds of George Ward; William Pearson, a formidable left-handed bat with great punishing powers; and Charlie Haswell, the gifted with bat and ball. When we were sufficiently fortunate to secure the services of Willie Heaviside, the Norton First Eleven player, we expected a good score from his accomplished bat, for he was very safe and could cut well through the slips. Herbert Heaviside was quite one of the best, and he got his runs in a very workman-like manner, and Ben Wilkinson was also very good. He was a free batsman who could collect his runs at a rapid rate and he could hit wonderfully hard considering his inches; while Dick Heaviside was a most useful man with any amount of freedom until he happened the accident that very much closed a most promising career.

I am reminded of Harry Bradley's valuable assistance when the claims of business did not interfere with his playing, the promising batting of Jack Ranson, and Robert Davison; and the help that we received from time to time from the masters of the Friends' School and when Ashley Warner of Norton elected to play with us his method of batting had a happy knack of frequently augmenting the score. It must not be inferred that the list is complete, for there are other names that have probably been unwittingly forgotten - is so, I owe the players an ample apology.

At the present moment, the game is dead by reason of the war, but there will come a time when it will be revived, and we shall again hear the plaudits of the spectators, as they do honour to the players of a future generation who will arise in due time to carry on the traditions of our village cricket.

24th January 1918

THE GREAT AYTON UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SOCIETY

In the 1870s, Cambridge, London, and Oxford Universities inaugurated University Extension classes. These were designed to bring university-level education to men and women in industrial towns, particularly in the north of England. Series of lectures were given by academics who saw their role as missionaries taking culture to the people. Some of the lectures were illustrated using the 'magic lantern' projector. At the 1899 Oxford University Extension summer meeting, there was the proposal to establish what would become the Workers' Educational Association.

The Great Ayton University Extension Society was established by Frank Rivers Arundel, who was headmaster of the Ayton Friends' School from 1896 to 1913. He provided a school lecture room with free light and heating. Older pupils from the school joined 'the village intellectuals' for the lectures and discussions.

I have been looking over a bundle of old papers relating to the Great Ayton University Extension Society with the view of refreshing my memory regarding its origin, and the work that it has accomplished; and it fortunately happens that the last report, issued in 1914, contains a resumé of the lectures; this and those issued in previous years supply the material from which these notes are formed.

It appears that, in the autumn of 1897, Miss Katharine Pease, of Woodside, Darlington, delivered six introductory lectures on Great Movements of the 18th Century, and that their cordial reception brought about the formation of the society in 1898. From that date to 1914 the society continued without interruption, although it covered the period of the Boer War, but at the breaking out of the present Great War the executive considered it desirable to suspend operations during its continuance, for the greatest tragedy that has happened since the Deluge, according to Lloyd George, was of much too serious a nature to be lightly set aside.

We recollected the effect of the Boer War upon the well-being of the society, and we rightly judged that the present conflagration would be far more disastrous. It may be taken that the aim of the society was the providing of a course of winter evening lectures that would be sufficiently popular to meet the public taste; and the following list will be useful in describing something of their range:-

- 1898 Evolution
- 1899 Venice
- 1900 The Romantic Revival of Letters
- 1901 Carlyle and Ruskin
- 1902 Descent of man
- 1903 Geographical Discovery
- 1904 Naval History
- 1905 Nature Study
- 1906 Browning
- 1907 Animal life
- 1908 Dante
- 1909 Europe in the 19th century
- 1910 Art in Daily Life
- 1911 Ancient Egypt
- 1912 Landmarks in Modern History
- 1913 Economic and Industrial Problems

As I turn my eye over the list it gives me many pleasant memories. I recall the very successful lectures of A W Brown M A. He appeared in 1898, 1902 and again in 1907. J Travis Mills M A, who was with us in 1909 and 1912, will be remembered by his audience for his remarkable oratorical powers, for his historical subjects permitted of their full employment. The name E T Compagnac, revives the remembrance of a delightful course on the Romantic Revival of Letters, but more particularly of his criticisms on the papers that were sent in by

reason of their humour and sarcasm, with which he kept the class in a state of expectant amusement. I think of the diminutive Miss Murray and her profound knowledge of the Land of the Pharaohs, for she had spent a winter excavating under Professor Flinders Petrie; and also of her novel interpretation of the Plagues of Egypt.

I am reminded of the quips and banter of the original J Stoughton Holborn M A whose concluding lecture on "Dress" will not easily be forgotten by those who had the good fortune to hear it - he kept his audience in a continuous roar of laughter as he slashed out right and left.

Extension Societies suffer from the ups and downs incident to other bodies. I recall the partial success of Geographical Discovery, Natural History, and Economic and Industrial problems - they did not quite catch on - and I have a deep-rooted impression that the Executive tried time after time to obtain a course on Music but without success. There appears to be something elusive about the musical profession, for each time a course was on the point of being fixed up, it slipped from our grasp.

We have now seen something of the one side of the picture, let us proceed to turn to the other, and hear what the lecturers have to say about the Centre and the work that it accomplished.

A W Brown M A reports:- "Of the three courses which I have given at Great Ayton, this seems to me to have been the most satisfactory. The audience has been larger, and the average standard of papers rather higher. The establishment of a students' association has no doubt been responsible for the increased interest in the paper work. The Centre owes very much to Miss E M Reynolds for the rouble she has taken in connection with the students' meetings. I am very glad to be able to report after nine years' experience of this Centre that it shows signs of increased vitality and steady improvement."

The Rev^d W N Draper M A says that:- "The six lectures on the Divine Comedy have been most attentively followed, and the numbers well sustained. Four students had qualified for examination at the date of delivery of the last lecture. The papers sent in were of a high level of intelligence."

Stoughton Holborn M A writes characteristically:- "Great Ayton not being a very large city is greatly to be congratulated upon having such a vigorous and thriving Centre at all."

Miss Murray is very complimentary and says:- "The Centre at Great Ayton, though a small one, has sent a large number of papers in proportion to its size than any Centre at which I have lectured this term. It has been a great pleasure to lecture to so sympathetic an audience."

And J Travis Mills M A after his second visit reports that:- "A small but, as always, a very appreciative audience attended this course of lectures at Great Ayton. Some excellent papers were written, and considerable use made of the books sent down by the university."

The Annual Reports are interesting reading, they recall the names of some of the more active members, and they contain items of useful information bearing upon a further aspect of the Centre. In that of 1903 I am reminded of the death of a valued member in the following extract:- "We deeply regret to recall the death of the Rev^d John Haswell M A (Vicar of Ingleby) one of our most enthusiastic supporters. The Society will miss his stimulating presence in its Councils, as well as at its lectures."

In 1904 it is apparent that the state of the Society was causing some anxiety, for it is recorded that:- "Though the Committee could not hide from themselves the fact that some decrease of interest has been manifest lately they were very anxious that Great Ayton - the smallest of the Oxford Centres - should not drop out. A canvass of the chief subscribers has resulted in a decision to have another course of lectures this year."

And in the 1905 Report it is stated that:- "The interest in the lectures, which had shown some sign of waning, received a distinct impetus by M^r Spicer's course."

In that of 1907 we learn that:- “A Students’ Association led by Miss Reynolds is another good sign”, and that “Miss Reynolds and M^r Arundel, the secretary, attended the Oxford Summer Meeting and gave some account of it to the Students’ Association.” It is apparent that this association was very much alive about this time, for at the termination of the course “it met 6 times for the Study of Shelley and Keats; so the 1908 Report records, and also that “Miss E M Reynolds again attended the Summer Meeting last year at Cambridge, and two of our members attended the Oxford Meeting this year viz: Miss Rawlings and the Secretary.” (Miss Reynolds was probably one of the daughters of the Rev Edward Reynolds, a Congregational minister who lived near High Green)

In that of 1909 we are told that:- “The Students’ Association has continued its meetings, and we are indebted to M^r J L Baker for acting as Secretary to this Association, as well as for his able services at the lantern for several sessions.”

In that of 1912 we received intimation of the resignation of the first Secretary in the following paragraph. “We regret to report that M^r Arundel, who has acted as Secretary to the Society since its foundation, resigned his position in the spring of this year. We are grateful to him for the excellent service he has rendered to the Centre for so many years. M^r J L Baker has kindly undertaken to fill the position of Secretary for the present.”

And in the 1914 Report the Great War promoted the following decision arrived at during the summer of that year by the executive:- “Owing to the unsettled state of the country at the present time the Committee have felt that it would be preferable not to arrange for any lectures for the winter term, and to consider later the desirability of having a course during the spring term of 1915.” It may be useful to add that the War has caused the operations of the Society to be held in suspension from its commencement in the summer of 1914 to the present time.

Such are some of the salient facts relating to the Great Ayton University Extension Society.

28th January 1918

CAPTAIN COOK

No description of Great Ayton would be considered to be complete unless it contained a reference to the great navigator, Captain James Cook, whose boyhood was spent in this village, so I propose to add a few words regarding him to bring out once again his local association.

Captain Cook was born at Marton on 27th of October 1728 and he perished on the 14th of December 1779. In the short space of 51 years this wonderful man, of humble parentage, crowded an unusual amount of incident into his remarkable life, and he left a name that will never be forgotten. Tradition claims him to have been of Scottish descent, if so, it is probable his fore-elders came south at the time of the great agricultural invasion into the north of England that brought many Scotch farmers into our locality two hundred years ago.

The father was a farm labourer, and was working at Marton at the time of the birth of his son, James. The boy was sent at an early age to William Walker of the same village to follow his father's occupation, and we are told that his mistress taught him his letters. On father becoming a hind to Thomas Skottowe, the Lord of the Manor of Ayton, the family removed to Aireyholme, near Roseberry, and James, who had evidently gone with it, proceeded to attract Thomas Skottowe's attention, for we learn that he was educated at the latter's expense at the school house, to which reference has been made in a previous article. His biographers tell us that a she appeared to be fitted to something better than the following of the plough, although at this moment a good ploughman is in very great request owing to the compulsory breaking up of grassland by reason of the world's shortage of food arising out of the war, he was apprenticed to a shop keeper by the name of Sanderson at the little fishing village of Staithes, where he broke his indentures by running away. His reason for so doing is still obscure. It is suggested on the one hand that he robbed the till, and on the other that his association with a sea-faring population fired his natural love of adventure.

Whatever the cause may have been, he made for Whitby and obtained occupation under the Quaker merchants, John and Henry Walker, with whom he served his apprenticeship, first on a coal trading vessel named the "Freelove" and afterwards in the "Three Brothers". In the process of time, he volunteered for the Navy, and was taken on board the "Eagle", a ship of 60 guns, on which he served as an able seaman. Receiving promotion, he joined the crew of Sir Cloudsley Shovel's ship the "Resolution", and ere long rose to be full master on board "Mercury", and was entrusted with the all-important work of making charts, for the perfecting of which he devoted a month to the study of navigation, mathematics and geometry. From this time onward he was engaged on many important surveys. He plotted out the Islands of Miguelon and S^t Pierre, he became Marine Surveyor of the Islands of Newfoundland, was sent to Otaheiti ([Tahiti](#)) to observe the transit of Venus, and surveyed New Zealand, and a part of Newfoundland. [James Cook was not born until 1728, twenty-one years after the death of Sir Cloudesley Shovell, shipwrecked off the Isles of Scilly. The James Cook who was with Sir Cloudesley Shovel and was later master of "Mercury" was not the James Cook from Great Ayton, but another mariner of the same name. This is a common error made by many authors.](#)

From 1772 to 1775 he was actively employed in the southern seas, and discovered Norfolk Island, and in 1779 met his death at the hands of the natives at Owhyhee ([Hawaii](#)). When we remember that these distant voyages would be made under sail, & in small vessels, whose primitive equipment would be very different from that which pertains in modern exploration, we can realize something of their arduous nature, and of the man who carried them through with such brilliant success.

3rd February 1918

THE OLD CHURCH

I am the last person who should attempt to write about the old church, for my knowledge of ecclesiastical architecture is extremely limited, church history is very unfamiliar to me and the laws and regulations that govern the Establishment are unknown to the writer. Nevertheless, I apprehend that a fine old edifice appeals to

each one in accordance with his taste; and in my case its historical instruction is its most interesting feature, for it recalls the religious tussles that have been waged around it, and the many vicissitudes that it has experienced.

If its interior has been allowed to remain we can picture the squire of the parish slumbering through the sermon in his well-curtained pew; the old clerk filled with the importance of his office, that has lost many of its duties in more recent times; and we can wander round after the service and gather much information from the mural tablets that are to be found within it. Then there are the Parish Registers that are reposing in the vestry, and they are growing in request, for pedigree hunting is in the air, and we long to prove the antiquity of our family. In effect, an old church is a store-house of knowledge, and it is ready to supply our various requirements. The Ayton Old Church is beautifully situated, it stands a little back from the road that skirts the northern side of the Low Green; and until it became obscured by the houses that have sprung up around it, it must have been a conspicuous and pleasing feature in the landscape, for the elevation of the site on which it stands lends an added distinction.

The records tell us that in 1123 Robert de Meinell gave the said church of All Hallows to the Abbot and Convent of Whitby. After that, there is a very long gap, for it is not until 1743 is reached that we are permitted to obtain a further glimpse. In that year a faculty has been granted for the erection of a new gallery. This was followed by another in 1780 for the rebuilding of the steeple; while two years later the church was repaired and generally renovated.

Sixty one years were to pass by before it was again repaired, and this time at the cost of M^r Marwood, the patron of the living. We are told that part of the nave was retained and improvements made “adding to the comfort of the worshippers and to the beauty of the church”. But in 1876 there is the significant announcement of the opening of the New Church. From that date, until the arrival of the Rev^d Harold Merryweather, the old church fell gradually into decay; but through his exertions, and those of his curate, the Rev^d R Oakley, it was sufficiently restored to permit of mid-week evening services being held within it.

If we compare the pictures of the old church with that which is left of it today, we cannot but observe the great change that has taken place in its appearance. The tower has gone, and with it the dignity and beauty of the sacred edifice. When I think of its hoary associations and its charming earlier exterior, I am at a loss to understand the reason for its substitution. When I hear its bell summoning its worshippers to its simple evening service it reminds me of an Ayton that has totally disappeared. It recalls the familiar figure of the Rev^d Joseph Ibbetson, the respected vicar of fifty years ago, who retired to Darlington to end his days, but who is buried by the side of his wife in the old church yard; it revives the memory of John and William Snowdon; Robert Fawcett, that staunch supporter of the church; Robert Watson the painter; John Hebron; Robert Longstaff; William Dixon the grocer; John Harbottle the elder, and his sons John and William; and many other.

It suggests the period of the Reformation and other religious upheavals in which the parish clerk was frequently called upon to stand alone, for according to Ditchfield, “he claimed a more perfect continuity of office than that of the rector or vicar”. “There was a time,” continued the learned ecclesiastical writer, “when the incumbents were forced to leave their care, and give place to an intruding minister appointed by the Cromwellian Parliament. But the clerk remained on to chant his amen to the long-winded prayers of some black-gowned puritan.” [Rev Peter Ditchfield \(1854-1930\) was a Church of England priest, a historian and a prolific author.](#)

And we can picture the perplexities of an old-time holder of the office in his pungent observation “Hardly know what I be. First vicar he called me Clerk, then another came and he called me Virgin, the last vicar said I were a Christian, and now I am Clerk again.” A quotation such as this provides us with ample food for reflection, it indicates in a few terse words the changes that had taken place within the speaker’s lifetime, and it opens up a vista of religious changes of which many of us are little aware.

AYTON AND STOKESLEY

I am inclined to think that Great Ayton has suffered materially by reason of its proximity to Stokesley, for although the population of the former place is greatly in excess of that of the latter, Stokesley still continues to be the centre round which the public life of the district revolves. We note the holding of the weekly cattle marts at which are sold the produce of the locality; the workhouse is situated there, and in its Board Room we hold the meetings of the District Council and those of the Board of Guardians; it is the town at which the Petty Sessional Courts are held for the Langbaugh West Division of the North Riding, it is the lead quarters of the Freemasonry of a very wide district, and it is noted for its prosperous agricultural show.

It appears to overshadow its more populous neighbour, and its recognised position is such that it appears to be unassailable, for it has also to be recalled that Stokesley has been a town of much repute for a very long period of time, and it may also be considered as being much more self-contained.

Great Ayton, on the other hand, comes within the influence of Middlesbro', and Middlesbro' attracts it like a magnet; it is need for shopping purposes, for entertainment and recreation, with the consequent result that it is not so much thrown back on itself. Our village has made many brave attempts to run an agricultural show, it has tried its hand at poultry but with fleeting success, it has drifted into horses, the exhibition of roots, garden produce and horticulture, it has developed an industrial section; but it is overweighted by its more fortunate neighbour, to whose exhibitions Tees-side come in its thousands. Stokesley fixes its show day regardless of the opportunities of those around it, whereas Great Ayton has been in the habit of selecting a day in the Stockton Race Week on the chance of attracting a gate.

When I compare the two places it frequently occurs to me that the inhabitants of Great Ayton do not blend with the ready facility that the Stokesley people do in the carrying out of an enterprise. I may be entirely wrong, but in my search for a reason, non-conformity crops up in my mind. Our village contains a very mixed class, there are the miners who are a law unto themselves, there is a small agricultural community, the necessary tradespeople who cater for our needs, and a very fair number who reside in it but who find employment on the banks of the Tees.

The religious requirements are met by the Wesleyan Body, the Primitive Methodists, the Congregational Chapel, the Established Church, the Society of Friends, and the Christian Scientists. We can select any of these for our spiritual comfort, and find ourselves one of a considerable number, for, with the sole exception of the last-named body, they possess many adherents. Non-conformity is going ahead, and the voice of the local preacher is heard in the land. It is not so many years since the Congregational Chapel was enlarged. The Primitive Methodists have built themselves a new chapel near the entrance gates to Cleveland Lodge, and since the outbreak of the present war, the Wesleyans have migrated to other quarters. They are the signs of much activity, and they indicate something of the vitality that abounds in their midst.

My own impression is that non-conformity is more suited to the progressive mind of the labouring classes - a term that is a misnomer at the present time in which we are all working under pressure - that the Established Church, there appears to be greater scope for the individual worker in the one than in the other, and his power is much less curtailed.

The blending of these water-tight compartments is a matter of much difficulty, for the collective point of view is very hard to adjust, for the tendency is to group around conformity or the reverse, and a common platform is beyond the power of human ingenuity to devise.

A good many years ago the Parish Council Act came into force, it was a new departure and its success depended upon the wise selection of suitable representatives to undertake its administration. When I ponder over the list of names, I am inclined to think that a suspicion of levity was introduced into the appointments.

We are aware of the fact that the powers under the Act are very limited, but it need not follow that they should be delegated to the unfit, for after all, village administration is an important affair.

When I contrast the two places it occurs to me that Great Ayton is the more go-ahead, but that it suffers from the limitations that are imposed upon it by the market town of Stokesley by reason of the facts already narrated, and it may also be pointed out that, geographically speaking, our village is very much detached, so much so indeed that the dwellers at one end may live for years without meeting some of those who live at the other - as I know from experience - whereas the town of Stokesley is contained in a very little space, nevertheless there can be no question as to which is the more picturesque, and in this Great Ayton easily carries off the prize.

17th February 1918

THE TRADESPEOPLE OF GREAT AYTON OF A PREVIOUS GENERATION

Sufficient has already been said to indicate something of the more important industries for which Great Ayton has been noted. Reference has been made to that of alum and to the tanning that was prosecuted for a very considerable time, and we have observed that the closing down of one was followed by the opening up of another, and that the process is still going on, for the opening up of the ironstone beds comes at the end of the whinstone period, and it supplies occupation for those who, otherwise, would be thrown out of work.

I am unable to ascertain the length of time that the alum was worked, but we are able to fix with greater certainty the duration of the tanning industry for the materials are fortunately at hand, and it may roughly be commuted at about 200 years; when we approach, however, the whinstone era we are reaching modern times and with it the names of Bradley and Winn will be forever associated, for Michael Bradley opened up the Langbaugh Rigg, and the Winns the deposit nearer Roseberry. They provided work for those who were likely to suffer by the decline of the earlier industries, just as the Tees Furnace Company L^{td} and Messrs Pease Partners L^{td} have done when the whinstone came to an end.

I am inclined to think that weaving must have also been a staple industry for a very considerable time and that it lingered on to within the recollection of some of the present older Aytonians, for old Robert Jackson's father followed the trade before he became the Rev^d Joseph Ibbetson's factotum, and I can still recall his appearance and his paper-capped head, the symbol of a previous occupation.

But it is my desire to add a few words regarding the smaller industries, for they bring us more into touch with the tradesmen who lived in the village at the time of my arrival some fifty years ago. The name of Harbottle is very familiar, and the pedigree is worth following up for we know that there was a Harbottle Castle down in Northumberland, and it is probable that the family came from the north. It has produced a multiple Mayor for the Borough of Darlington - I know not how many times he has filled the civic chair - and many much respected members, for the family may be termed individualistic. ([John George Harbottle was Mayor of Darlington six times: in 1900 and each year from 1913 to 1917](#)) I recall old John Harbottle, he reached the great age of 95, and he founded the firm that is still represented by his grandson, Joseph John, in California; and by Elijah H Harbottle in the centre of the village, but it has to be remembered that they are now separate businesses for the cousins work apart.

Of the old man's two sons, viz William and John, William was undoubtedly the stronger character, he was very independent and tenacious of his own views, and he filled many parochial offices with inestimable credit until the Parish Council Act came into force in 1895, when he retired from public life. William Harbottle received his early training, as a builder, under John Sparks of Darlington and the knowledge that he obtained fitted him admirably to undertake the erection and the alterations of many of the larger houses that sprang up around the village. He was much esteemed by Thomas Richardson, and he has frequently told me that he was sent for by the latter to act as playmate to the late Sir Joseph Pease on his frequent visits to Cleveland Lodge. My father much appreciated William Harbottle, and during our yearly visits to Ayton Firs he was generally to be seen at work on the property, so it became my custom to ask him to bring me a copy of the Yorkshire Post morning by morning from which to learn the progress of the First-Class cricket matches, for I followed the game very closely even in the far-off seventies, a habit that caused my father frequently to remark "William, the boy's head is full of nothing but cricket", an observation that was not so very far from the mark.

It often occurred to me that if William Harbottle had seen fit to have embarked in business in one of the big centres of industry his sterling character and undoubted ability would have carried him far, but he chose to remain in Great Ayton in preference to a more ambitious career, and he enjoyed the life that he had designed for himself. Old John Harbottle, his father, belonged to an earlier period, it was one associated with hard work and longer hours than are customary today, and I have heard it said that it was no uncommon thing for him and one of his apprentices to trundle a pair of newly made wheels down to Stockton by hand to avoid the payment of cartage.

William Harbottle had two sons, the multiple Mayor of Darlington, John George, and Elijah Hollingsworth; the former after completing his education at the Stokesley Grammar School, entered the office of William Harding, the Darlington sharebroker, and subsequently took up shareholding on his own account, a business he is still engaged in; while Elijah has followed in his father's footsteps and continued the family business to the benefit of his numerous clients; he more closely resembles his father than his brother in many of his distinguishing features, and reproduces his parent's individualism in a marked degree.

Another of the earlier builders was John Hebron, who built Hebron's Row in California many years ago, to one of whose houses I came on my first visit, to an aunt, about the year 1864. This Row has sadly fallen away in recent years but, at the time of which I am writing, was quite one of the most desirable in that part of the village. John Hebron retired from business many years before his death, but he continued to reside in the village, and he could be met any Sunday morning making his way down to church, for he was a God-fearing man, and was very regular in his attendance.

Lower down the village could be found the joiner's shop of David Bottomley, the wheel-wright. He was one of the last of the old Constables that were swept away by the institution of the Village Police, and he could recount many amusing adventures when engaged in the prosecution of his duty. I saw a good deal of David, and his sons, David, William, Jack and Frank, during my school summer vacations, for it was my habit to inveigle the younger members out to a game of cricket during the dinner hour, for they were not averse to a knock.

The batchelor brothers, John and William Snowdon, who claimed a family connection with the Wrightsons of Norton and Neasham, were hackney-coach proprietors and blacksmiths, and they also kept a hardware shop that is now in the occupation of Samuel Terry. It was attended to by a lame sister, who would hobble across the road that separated it from their home with the aid of a crutch. This shop appeared to contain everything that could be suggested, but it was so crammed with stock that much difficulty was experienced in finding the desired article, for it appeared to be the brothers' last idea to bring about any arrangement of it. William devotes most of his time to the coaching business, and his pair of white horses were frequently to be met with at the railway station or out in the district, but his eccentric nature stood in the way, and interfered with the prosperity that he should have attained, for he thought nothing of turning a horse away in a loose-box for years at a time in preference to selling an undesirable beast. There is a story to the effect that towards the end of his extraordinary career he was driving down from the station in solitary state when the animal suddenly fell in the shafts. He remained placidly on the box-seat pulling gently at its head and exhorting his recumbent steed to arise and proceed. A passer-by, attracted by the unusual spectacle, proceeded to examine the horse and finding that its life had departed, intimated the result to the unsuspecting owner, who rose from his seat and after peering at the animal for some time replied in that grand manner that was so very much his own, "I really believe he is".

The visitor to Great Ayton, who happened to fall into William's hands, cannot fail to remember the way in which he pointed out the particular places of interest, nor a visit to Captain Cook's mother's grave in the old church yard, with which the entertainment normally closed. On one occasion he was engaged to drive an afternoon caller up to The Firs, and as he reached the boundary of my brother's property, he raised his whip in indication, and remarked "Edwards". The visitor, not knowing in the least what he meant, asked him for an explanation, but it was sometime before he deigned to satisfy her curiosity.

The two brothers employed a nephew, John Nelson, whose work lay chiefly in the blacksmith's shop, he was the great friend of William Yorke the saddler, who followed his father in the family business. The Yorkes were descended from a Dales family which, many years before had been servants under George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, the erratic nobleman, who died at Kirby Moorside in 1688.

The purse-proud Tommy Eldon was the leading butcher, and William Hauxwell the mill-wright. He had the shooting over my father's Ayton property in the early days of its purchase, but his excitability was such in the pursuit of his game that it was incumbent upon those who went with him to be on their guard.

The leading grocers were Jeremiah Thistlethwaite and William Dixon, the father of the present members of the firm, who still continue business in the family premises, and opposite to them Charlton, the blacksmith, was to be found in the shop that is at present occupied by John Bradley. The little low-roofed dwelling at the corner of the bridge was then the post office, and it was the home of Joseph Longstaff, postmaster, rate collector and parish clerk.

At that time there was only one postal delivery, and the mails came in from Northallerton in the morning, and the out-going letters were collected at five o'clock for the return journey. The outlying houses were required to send for their letters, and it was our custom to send down for them when we were staying at The Firs. Joseph was an excellent postman but he had views of his own, and if it did not suit his purpose to commence his round of delivery at the usual time he thought little of the delay, for letters in those days were a luxury, to be treated accordingly. His habits were those of a previous generation, that included a regular visitation to a neighbouring inn for the refreshment of body and mind, and he came to a watery grave one stormy winter's evening, when the Leven was in flood, through missing the approach to the bridge in the thick darkness that prevailed.

Tommy Peart was another Ayton character; he farmed in his early days at The Grange, where he made a name for himself with his celebrated Cleveland Bays, but from one cause or another he retired from farming and took to the carrying trade. He was a great lover of cricket, and up to the end of his life was prepared to play any one of his own age at single-wicket.

Another carrier was Henry Kitching, whose head-stone is to be found in the non-conformist part of the cemetery on the Guisbro' Road; and the leading painter was Robert Watson, that staunch supporter of the established church, his closing years were superintended by his daughter, Annie, who kept a watchful eye over his movements and steered him with skill amid the shoals of a second matrimonial enterprise ([the original sentence ended here, but Henry Kitching added this at the bottom of the page:](#)) that his far-seeing daughter took care that it should come to nought.

The tannery at the low end of the village was occupied by Jack Jackson, but he dabbled in horses to his undoing, and retired from business to a house in California where he ended his days in circumstances very different from those that he had been used to in earlier life, for at one time he had wielded considerable power.

I do not recollect Richard Carlen, the spirit merchant, to whom reference had been made in the notes on Great Ayton cricket, but his brother, Joe, who died suddenly in the summer of 1917, assisted the widow in continuing the business, the latter had served in the army in his younger days, and had been stationed in India. He was exceedingly fond of recounting his foreign experiences, and his affability tended to make him a very agreeable companion.

When I think of the shoemakers, Robert Jackson naturally comes into the mind - who does not remember his ready wit and his bonhomie? He was the essence of good nature and he dearly loved a joke.