

The provenance of this document is unknown, and there seem to be several versions about. I have slightly changed the punctuation and a few words to make it easier to read. Ian Pearce, 18 July 2006.

It has occurred to me that there are many people now living in Great Ayton who would be interested in hearing something of the village as it was over seventy years ago when my parents removed here from Bishop Auckland in 1841, which was only three or four years after the opening of the first railway for passengers, the Stockton & Darlington Railway, as it was then called. The carriages for third class passengers were similar to the coal trucks of these days; passengers stood inside and there were no seats and no cover. Middlesbro' was our nearest station, which was then not so large as Ayton is now, with a population considerably under 1,000. Before this time anyone coming to Ayton from the south took the coach-and-four from Northallerton which travelled via Guisbro' to Whitby. I once had the privilege of travelling with it walking over the moor as far as Warpley where it stayed, for a change of horses. Ayton must at one time have been a resting place as there was for sometime the ruins of a hotel where the Marwood School was built.

I presume all Ayton people have heard of Captain James Cook who lived at Ayton with his parents as a boy and attended the only school there was then in the village. The property, which is still standing, was given to the village by Michael Postgate, the lower part was used as poor houses and the upper part approached by stone steps, was the school room and room for the Master. The last to hold the office was a Wm Sanderson, the British School being built about 1846 and the Marwood School a few years later. The former might have been called the Richardson School as it was built almost entirely at the expense of Thomas Richardson. These schools were supported by the payments from the children varying from 1d to 6d per week, with the help of subscription*. Michael Postgate stipulated when he made over the old school to the village that twelve children should be educated free of charge. This was continued until education was free, when in lieu of this, five pounds is paid over to each school per annum. When Thos. Richardson died he left several shares in the Stockton & Darlington Railway, now the North Eastern, to maintain a non-denominational school in Ayton. This money, about £70 per annum, has been so far spent over alterations and improvements in the British School, but will in future be used for scholarships.

The aforesaid T Richardson was a native of Ayton. His parents were in moderate circumstances. He got a situation in London as office boy in a bank and by perseverance and frugality rose by degrees until he became a partner. It was his own want of education that made him anxious to help others. It was by his generosity the Friend's School was established at Ayton. The property belonged to one Joseph Heselton and consisted of a gentleman's house (the portion with the steps and pillars) the next buildings were two thatched cottages which were pulled down and the first part of the school proper was built. Then the wing to the south, then a house bought of Philip Heselton was added and altered. Now a fourth addition is being made. There is an oil painting of Thomas Richardson hung up in the school dining room which is true to life. About 1846 Cleveland Lodge was built on a portion of the school farm.

It is astonishing how little things stick to ones memory. A labourer at the building named Michael, of course an Irishman, used to buy cockles and roast them on a fire. Several times he let me share, remember I was only six or seven years old, and I thought them delicious. I remember him bringing me some bats which were pulled down with the thatch where they were hibernating for the winter. All this work must have made the village very busy. There were then only two shops of importance if I may use the word, one on the High Green connected with the public house, the Green Oak, and the other where the Unionist Club is now. The former belonged to Tom Wilson, a very portly man, but like a large number of people unable to write even their own names. There was a story that Tom Wilson had a scheme of his own for his book keeping. On one occasion he informed one of his customers that he owed him for a large cheese. He said "Nay it was a grindstone" he owed him for. "Ah", says Wilson, "so it was. I forgot to put the prop in the middle". I remember when Mrs Wilson bought eggs she always put them in water when those which were not fresh-laid swam while the others sunk. They were then sometimes 28 and even 30 for a shilling. It reminds me of the story of a woman who was selling eggs 30 for the shilling and asked if they were fresh laid, assured her customer she could vouch for that as they were all laid by one hen.

The low shop was kept by a Friend named Isaac Brown, who did a good business as a tallow chandler. Candles were comparatively cheap. Of course they were all dips, some very common long ones had a rush in the centre and were called rush lights. They gave a very poor light, not sufficient to read by. There were of course oil lamps but they were very greasy. How I used to enjoy seeing these candles get bigger and bigger as each fresh dipping solidified and was ready for the next. There was a story that Isaac Brown was very particular to give exact weight neither too little nor

too much, and had been known to split a raisin in two. This must be apocryphal as he might easily have changed a raisin for a larger one or vice versa. But I must begin to describe the village more.

The only houses in California were the two; one now used as a greengrocer's shop and the little one adjoining it, and the Tile Sheds farm house, named from the land being once used for making bricks and tiles which were then coming into use to take the place of thatch. From the gateway at Cleveland Lodge to these two houses there was a dirty cart road hardly wide enough for two carts to pass, at one side some flag stones for a footpath. The cart road stopped here but the footpath extended to the Guisbro' road. The property here belonged to an old lady who always went by the name of Betsy Martin. She lived in the house now occupied by the doctor. The land now owned by the Thistlethwaites belonged to her. She sold milk from house to house. She had two measures, one for winter and the other for summer, 1d pint all the year round. She had a mule that was over forty years of age. Her old servant Ann was older than her mistress, who was not less than 70 when I knew her, and whom the men persuaded to put her name on the census as 30. She bought hides, had them tanned and cured and cut up suitable for shoemakers, always doing the latter herself. I saw her at work several times with a sharp knife shaped like a half moon. She told me most people kept their boots several months before wearing them, this she said is a mistake. I remember the old lady used to walk up the aisle of the Friends' Meeting House her boots squeaking almost like a musical instrument, this was considered a sign of good leather. You will wonder how she disposed of her goods. Well she had a shop in Manchester, to think of spending three days in going and other three days returning empty. I think I would recognise her voice, she had a lisp, if I heard her now.

Some of you may not know how the name of California became attached to the place. My father got an idea that if people could be persuaded to buy a little land they could use it for gardening or even building cottages so he got John Richardson of Langbaugh to sell a field to be cut up into allotments of a quarter acre each, the payment of which was to be in yearly instalments paying at the same time interest on the unpaid capital, the cost to be £30 per quarter acre, the whole to be paid off in a certain time, the road to be measured in. It was a long time before the scheme was taken up and many noisy meetings were held in the British School. At last, by some parties taking two or three, and in one case four lots, the whole were subscribed for. This opened the way for making the footpath to the Guisbro' road wide enough for carts. As this happened at the time when gold was discovered in California, it by degrees got that name attached to it.

At the corner of the high green where the Village Hall is there were two poor thatched cottages where weavers lived and at the corner a joiner's shop where John Harbottle worked. He lived up in the corner by the Friends' Meeting House, his wife for many years being the caretaker. How little did they know that their grandson would be a Dick Whittington, five times Mayor of Darlington. Coming to the Station Road, at the corner by the iron gates leading to Thistlethwaites, was a substantial house stuccoed, then three or four cottages finishing off with the Tea Rooms, the gate opening into the School Farm. These buildings were destroyed by fire and the substantial stone buildings erected, but further from the road. Where the school museum is now there was a cottage which was last used as a work shop, one room being occupied by Robert Jackson where he made and mended the children's boots and shoes. The school children were then provided with clothing at the cost of the school, so he was always very busy generally talking to some young visitor all the time. Where Chestnut House (the school sanatorium) is now was a pretty little cottage completely covered with ivy. The garden on the play ground side had a cherry tree and garganell pear. Round the cherry tree was a beautiful moss rose, a root of which I still possess. It was the house where I and my wife lived when we were married.

Then there were the houses on Station Road, now standing but much improved, at the end of which was the gas premises where Willie Galvert lived so many years. Willie was a steady good Wesleyan, never in a hurry, an acquirement almost lost now-a-days. It was said he never was seen to run except on the day when the farm buildings were on fire.

We next come to the mill-yard. The Oil Mill was built for extracting oil from linseed, the cake being used then as now for cattle. The linseed was heated then put in hair bags and crushed by stampers, which made a continual thumping noise which could be heard for some distance. Then there was Seaton Cottage, a shabby little house which was used for bottling ginger beer and lemonade.

You may notice up the Station Road a number of beech trees. These were grown for the sake of the wood which was largely used in the Oil Mill. Where the half-dozen large beech trees now stand was a cottage where the linseed oil was boiled, very ticklish process, as once being on fire nothing can stop the flames. It was said an oil boiler

accidentally fell in the cauldron of boiling oil, since which time until the opening of the railway a ghost might often be seen of course in the dusk of the evening, walking about. The cottage was afterwards utilized as a bath house for the school where boys and girls bathed certain days of the week, the large upper chamber being used as a dressing room.

Stories of ghosts were very rife in those days. Two or three houses had oval openings in the doors or shutters, it was said to allow the evil spirits a safety way of exit. These were generally supplemented by a horse shoe which not only drove off evil spirits but also brought good luck, in those days people were very ignorant and consequently very superstitious. I remember once my brother and I heard a clanking noise in the Friend's grave yard and, after summing up an unwonted degree of courage, were determined to combat the ghost which we dimly saw in the distance. I think my brother took a dash with his arms spread wide and actually caught it, it was Foxtan's white donkey which had made its way from the High Green.

Mr. Pearson's house and the Cottages and Park Square were not then built. Where Coates lives was a butcher's shop. The road at the end of the new buildings of the school was for access to Betsy Martin's tan-yard, afterwards purchased by the school and converted into the present commodious swimming bath, the water being obtained from the high dam crossing the River Leven, in a pipe attached from the ornamental bridge. To return to buildings in the village. There was no Waterfall Terrace or Wesleyan Chapel. The central house where Squire Jackson lives being occupied by the doctor who was generally called Old Mr Loy to distinguish him from his son who succeeded him in the practice. Where Terry has his shop was a blacksmith's shop then occupied by John Snowdon the elder. Where the Police Station is now built was the Wesleyan Chapel, built on a site given to the Wesleyans by Betsy Martin. I believe previously that they occupied a small chapel near the Mill Race. The public house at the corner was occupied by one Joe Watson who eked out a living by cooperage tubs were then in high demand. That reminds me we were once passing and saw a half imbecile young man busy passing and said we were glad to see him so occupied. - replied "I can work ye know when Wills at yam".

At the end of the row of buildings where the Police Offices are was a blacksmith's shop occupied by old Jasper who spent nearly all his time in making nails, all nails and tacks were then made by hand. People in Ayton at that time were very poor. The tan-yards, labouring on the then three farms, stone-breaking, and weaving were the principle employments. There were then about twenty looms going, weaving coarse sheets, table cloths, etc. It was usual for good housewives to keep a stock of linen goods far beyond their requirements and these home made articles did wear well. I remember being shown some sheets which had been in the family nearly 100 years. A good deal of the flax was then grown in the neighbourhood, the linseed being sent to the mill and the stalk being converted into linen yarn. Weavers worked long hours and were very badly paid. They rose early in the morning and retired early, especially during the winter months; the work was also unhealthy as it required close attention in a stooping position. After being woven the linen had to be washed, and bleached. I believe there are still linen mills at Osmotherly. The last weaver in Ayton was Robert Jackson's father, who was also the village hairdresser. He used to take his work to Hutton Rudby. The Ayton work was principally bleached at Easby.

Whale fishing was an occupation that was taken up by many of the young men. It was very dangerous work. The captains of whaling vessels came out to country places and got their crews made up of young men who were occupied on the land in summer, and joined the whaling ships during the winter months, by this means they helped out their very slender means. I remember one old man who broke stones, showing me his maimed hands where he had lost some fingers from frost bites, by-the-bye the man's name was Cook, yes, Tommy Cook. The earnings of these men largely depended on what they called their luck, that was the number of whales they captured, they of course were fed during the time but I have no doubt on very coarse food and no vegetables so they were liable to scurvy. The whales' jaw bones were sometimes brought home as trophies and used for gate posts, the last of these is now in Mr Henry Kitching's grounds. They must have cost a great deal to bring them to Ayton for after the sea voyage they were to bring over the moors from Whitby, some 25 miles. With the portion buried in the ground they must have been about 15 feet in length. Of course they were very durable, lasting probably 100 years.

Speaking of shipping, which was largely carried on at Whitby, all vessels were made of oak as all the woods round about were planted with oak trees. The bark of the oaks was so useful for tanning, at the spring time many men were occupied in stripping the bark from the trees. The spent bark was of very little use, it was so long in decaying, but gave out a gentle heat and was used largely for heating cucumber frames. Very poor people used them when thoroughly dried for keeping their fires burning. With a good deal of coaxing and a pair of good bellows they could get up enough, heat to boil the kettle. Coals were very expensive as they had to be brought direct from the pits

generally on the backs of mules or donkeys. All spare wood was utilised, also turf and heather (ling). At the school we used a large quantity every year for lighting fires. In order to get a light in those days we had to use steel and flint. The sparks were caught in the tinder box, where there was a supply of burnt linen, then a splinter of wood was put to it the end of which had been dipped in sulphur. Lucifer matches had just been invented and were considered a wonderful contrivance.

In those days nearly every house holder possessed a pig. Besides consuming potatoes and refuse from his garden it served as a savings bank. They were generally kept at the back door, near the house, for convenience. This would not be allowed now. There was often a rivalry as to who should have the biggest pig. I remember Anderson Shaw the tailor having one that weighed 40 stones. I think they would tire of both bacon and ham before they finished it. The fat must have been several inches thick.

It reminds me of a Bilsdale man who said he never felt as though he had had a meal unless he had a bit of bacon with it. At the beginning of the cold weather there was seldom a day passed but there was a great squealing, as someone was killing his pig. Sometimes a poor man would go to his sty and find his pig dead, and it was then as though his bank had broke.

A friend of mine said he went to a hotel where they also gave him ham and eggs for his dinner so he thought he would ask what they had on hand, the reply being "Ham & Eggs or Sike like". "Well", he said, "I will have ham & eggs so often that I will have Sike like". I am afraid the Sike like was eggs and ham instead of ham & eggs!

Several poor people kept geese. The geese and goslings looked very pretty grazing on the grass of the green but the old gander was a terror to the little children as they went to school, and knew full well how to defend himself and the little goslings. Several donkeys were kept by poor people (there was no duty on donkeys as there was on all ponies above a certain height). One or two kept small cows They were allowed then to graze in the lanes, but this liberty was sometimes sadly abused by people turning them into the farmers' fields during the night and taking them out very early in the morning. At other times they made their way through gaps in the hedges. I remember four geese which regularly got in a grass field and stayed there overnight, though I told the owner to keep them out which he said he could not do. One morning I was passing by and saw only three geese, a fox had gone off with one, and the rest were never seen in the field any more.

Another source of income was bee-keeping. There were very few householders who had not one or more hives of bees, which they took to the moors at ling time and often secured stores of honey. It looks as though the seasons had considerably changed, as they seldom now get more than will keep them during the winter and sometimes have to be fed with syrup to keep them alive. I once had a few hives, and one of them seemed weakly so I asked a gardener who was working for me what was the matter. He took the hive and turned it upside down and pointed with his finger to a quantity of old comb. "Why" I said, "James, the bees will sting you" but he only laughed. The only reason I could find for the bees not stinging him was that he was saturated with tobacco. They evidently thought it was horrid stuff, I wish all human beings were as wise. Perhaps it was partly on account of his gentle way; lesson, if you want to live peaceable with all men be kind and gentle. Another time I asked a gardener, not the same man, to put some straw round three hives for the winter. I did not look at them till one fine day when they should have been flying in the sunshine there were no bees to be seen. On looking closely I found the entrance to each hive fastened up with clay and the bees smothered. When I questioned the old man he said "The bees were going to sting me so I fastened them in". I replied "Yes, but you never let them out again".

Children were worked very hard in those days; they commenced work at seven years of age winter and summer during their first apprenticeship, then another seven years for their second apprenticeship. One thing I have often witnessed, and that is little boys seven or eight years of age were obliged to go up chimneys and sweep them with a hand brush. The head was covered with a cap fastened under the chin, and he had to get to the top and put his brush out of the chimney to show he had really got there, and then to sweep his way down. Children were sometimes kidnapped and kept for the purpose by wicked men. At the best of times they had a hard life of it. This was abolished by Act of Parliament brought in by Earl Shaftesbury.

I think Christmas was more of a time of feasting in those days; almost everyone had cheese and spice cake or pepper cake (ginger bread) to hand to visitors. If you did not partake you were sure to give offence. When Thistlethwaite's shop was first opened I have seen a good cart load of ginger bread and dozens of cheeses just before Xmas. The spice cake was generally called yulecake. Sometimes people came round who blacked their faces and five or six

together would walk into a house and remain there until they got something to eat. They never spoke and were called Mummers. I know we, as children, were very frightened of them.

Before I conclude, I must mention the north country dialect, which was then almost invariably used by working men and women in familiar conversation. Many of the words are almost pure Danish, the Danes having settled largely in this part of England. In this respect it differs from many other dialects which are mostly mispronunciations. The name of the village was generally spoken of as "Tatten", or "Canny Yatten", probably derived from Yat (a gate, as Chop Yat in Bilsdale). Along all the principal roads there were toll gates where money was collected for repairing the roads. Formerly oxen were very much used for draught work. I have seen them myself leading hay at Helmsley. They were fastened two-by-two to a yoke going over the shoulders. We have retained the word here in the north and talk of yoking the horse, a horses collar we call a barfin, then there are the hymes (pronounced yames) etc. I am not an adept at the dialect though very much interested in it. I once asked a south countryman if he would ask the farmer to put the horse in the stable. The farmer said to him, "Man, I tak t gears off". He was completely puzzled, so came to me for an explanation, "George, the man asks me if he has to cut the horses ears off, whatever does he mean?" I suppose you all know. Jimmy Boyes had been gardening and asked the lady, "Hun I waiter d' pis Ah sue". I have puzzled several with a simple expression one sailor made to another, "We waz wither".

Now this essay would be incomplete without a few words on drinking. At one time the village was an average specimen as regards intemperance, the public houses were open till late at night and you could hear intemperate men bawling about and continuing sometimes till midnight. About that time the Total Abstinence movement was begun by seven men at Preston in Lancashire. It spread rapidly, and several people in Ayton signed the pledge. John and Hannah Richardson warmly espoused the cause and Ayton soon began to be an active centre. Meetings were frequently held in the British School Room, which was then the only place available for public meetings. Lecturers were invited over and always found a home at Langbaugh. The room was often packed and many signed the pledge. Elderly people will remember some of these popular speakers; Dr Lees, Jabez Inwards, Wm Johnson (once a drunken platelayer), and others whose names have slipped my memory.

In consequence Ayton became a model village so far as drink was concerned. Broughton followed its example and the Temperance Hall there was built, and well patronized. This was through the persuasive power of a Mrs Hardwick. Some 30 or 40 signed the pledge at one meeting held in the old Wesleyan Chapel. A large Band of Hope was established and carried on vigorously for some time. An independent Minister named Atkinson was very active. It was a funny coincidence that some years later when I went with my daughter to Germany, the first persons I met on board the steamer were Mr and Mrs Atkinson on their way to Hamburg, where Mr Atkinson was going to officiate at a small English Chapel.

While these meetings were being held a young man from Norway named Asbjorn Kloster, took the pledge and when he returned to Norway commenced the first Total Abstinence Society in that land. He wrote tracts and edited a monthly paper, a devoted man and earnest speaker. Only about a year ago a statue was raised to his memory in his native town of Stavanger. Then came the blue ribbon movement some years later when over 1000 took the blue ribbon or gospel pledge. A large tent was erected on the green and lectures held every evening for a full week. In this particular we are far short of our predecessors.

I will finish with an exhortation of Paul to the Philippians we shall all do well to remember. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just and whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if any praise, think on these things."