



Portraits of Ralph Jackson and his wife

RALPH JACKSON

Ralph Jackson (1736-1790) was a North Yorkshire landowner and man of business about whom we know a considerable amount because the diaries he composed have almost all survived. Jackson's great achievement was to keep a diary for over forty years, from the age of 13 until his death. This diary, in 19 leather-bound volumes labelled alphabetically from **A** to **U**, covers the period from 1749 to 1790, with the exception of two years (1754-5) when he ceased writing it, and also 1767-8 (Book **M**) which is missing from the collection. The manuscript of the diary is held today at Teesside Archives, Middlesbrough (ref. U/WJ)), and now, for the first time, it has been transcribed in its entirety, although excerpts from it have frequently been used by local historians and others.

The transcription involved a group of volunteers (listed below) and was a lengthy project, as the diary itself contains over 600,000 words, and there are also associated documents including Jackson's account book, and also his will and the inventory of his house on his death.

Ralph Jackson's diary yields a great deal of information, firstly, about the life of a young apprentice in Newcastle before the industrial revolution. In 1756 the twenty-year-old Ralph was now in the final year of his apprenticeship to the coal merchant, William Jefferson, and was living in the house of his master. Exactly where this house was is uncertain, but we do know that his parish church was All Saints, close to the riverside (see map). Jefferson was a member of the influential Company of Hostmen, and his role was to supply coal to the ships that called at the Tyne from ports all along the east and south coast. Ralph seems to have a good relationship with his master, and also with Jefferson's sister, Mrs Hudspeth, and her son William who lived nearby.

By now Ralph was being entrusted with most of the duties of a Hostman, including dealing with the crews of the barges (or 'keels') owned by Jefferson, which transported coal from riverside staiths to the colliers anchored near the mouth of the Tyne. The coal came from local mines (e.g. Byker; Long Benton) by horse-drawn wagons running on wooden rails, and Ralph had to walk considerable distances to the various staiths to check that the right amount of coal was being loaded. He made regular trips to the 'canhouse' where the keelmen received their beer and their weekly wages and he also helped the captains of the colliers to 'clear' their ships by paying the requisite taxes at the Custom House and the Town House. He was frequently entrusted with bills of exchange or large sums of money. When he was not being dispatched on his master's business, he often worked at home, in the office, copying out accounts or letters. Clearly, he took his duties very seriously, and was concerned on the few occasions when his master found fault with him. He also wrote regular letters to his relatives, and he kept his own accounts, which he submitted to his father each month. To send a letter was not quite what it is today, and many entries refer to the complexities of the postal system, which usually involved a personal meeting with the carrier involved (for Richmond, where Ralph's family lived, it was William Battison).

Ralph at this age was not quite as devout as he had been in his mid-teens, when he had spent much time in his room reading religious books lent to him by his friends William Henderson and Thomas Scafe. However, he still attended church twice every Sunday, sampling various ones in the vicinity, and he also went to Scafe's house for prayer meetings. Another interest was transcribing music and practising his 'German' flute. He also went for long walks with his friends, shopped on behalf of his sisters at home in Richmond, took good care of his own clothes, and was particularly proud of his watch, which enabled him to record the time of going to bed each night. There was the very occasional concert or play in town, or a visit to the Town Moor to see the horse races. But generally, he appears a conscientious youth who had few diversions apart from his reading and his music. It comes as quite a shock when, on 30th June he ends his recital of the day's events with "NB I danced".

There are many references in the diary to national and international affairs. 1756 was a year of crisis, and at the start of this extract the Seven Year War with France was just about to begin. Ralph notes the general fear of a possible French invasion, and the search for volunteers for the militia, but his main concerns were the prospect of an embargo on all coastal shipping, and the danger that Jefferson's keelmen might be impressed for the navy.

At the end of October 1756, Ralph paid a short visit home to Richmond and also met his uncle, Ralph Ward, in Guisborough. The third of November must have been one of the most important days of his life because his diary records "my Uncle told me this morning that he intends me to live with him after I've serv'd my time out", and shortly afterwards he left Newcastle for good. Just before leaving there was a farewell dinner with seven friends, after which he records, unsurprisingly, that he suffered "a very indifferent night".

Over the following months Ralph got to know his rich and successful uncle, and was introduced to his various business interests. He became acquainted with the complicated process of alum manufacture, as his uncle was part-owner of the alum works at Boulby, a short distance down the coast. He also learnt about sheep and cattle, and was taught how to slaughter an ox. In the evenings he sometimes read aloud to his no doubt irascible uncle, who suffered from continuous ill health, and the diary is full of his various ailments and the remedies attempted by the medical men. Meanwhile, Ralph criss-crossed the Cleveland countryside on the horse his uncle had given him, and continued to develop his own

business acumen. and, secondly, about the Cleveland area of North Yorkshire during the second half of the eighteenth century. It is also unusual among historical diaries owing to its exceptional longevity. We can trace the development of the boy into a young man, and then into the self-confident man of affairs and pillar of the local community, always on horseback to maintain his extensive network of friends and business contacts. We can trace, too, how his grammar and spelling improves and his vocabulary widens over the years. There is much material here for those interested in particular themes: the role of a rural magistrate; the banking and credit system of the day; transport by sea and road; medical affairs; agriculture. There are also more specialized topics – the local connections with Captain Cook and his colleagues – the coastal alum industry – the reading matter of an intelligent and largely self-educated aspirant to the gentry class. Above all, there is Ralph himself, cautious, respectable and hard-headed in business, yet also loving towards those closest to him, charitable to the poor, tolerant in matters of religion, and generally fair-minded and equable to everyone he encountered.

We might now move forward to 1768, about the midpoint of the diaries. In that year Ralph was 32. He was living in the house on Westgate, Guisborough, which he had inherited from his wealthy uncle, Ralph Ward, who had died in 1759 leaving all his property to his nephew. However, he had plans to set himself up as a country gentleman, in a style suitably reflecting his means. Recently he had bought himself an estate at Normanby, some eight miles north of Guisborough and close to the Tees, which included a dilapidated old mansion (Normanby Old Hall), and this he was in process of renovating to make it fit to live in. Therefore, until May 1770, the date he moved to Normanby, he was living in Guisborough, but making frequent trips to his new estate to supervise builders and carpenters, organise the planting of hedges and oaks in his grounds, and meet with his Normanby tenant farmers.

Ralph Jackson lived an energetic life. He had a wide circle of friends, ranging from tradesmen, farmers and apothecaries to some of the more superior families in the neighbourhood, such as the Chaloners of Guisborough, the Hales of Tocketts, with their twenty-one children, and the Mauleverers of Ingleby Arnecliffe. It was one of the three Mauleverer daughters to whom he proposed marriage on an outing to the Durham coast, but she refused him saying she was too young. However, not long afterwards, on a trip to London to stay with his sister Dorothy and her husband, Captain Jeffery Jackson, he did meet another young girl, Mary Lewin, who must have been more accommodating because a few years later they were married. A newly formed and rather exclusive club where Ralph Jackson could enjoy fraternising with not only Mauleverers and Chaloners, but even Lady Dorothy Fitzwilliam and Lady Charlotte Dundas, was called the Lady's-Tees-Water Club of Coatham.

Because he owned much property, including a share in the Boulby alum works, and several farms which he leased out, Ralph Jackson inevitably had a lot to do with lawyers. Two attorneys whom he met almost on a weekly basis were John Preston and John Matthews, both from Stokesley, and it was Matthews who was to involve him in the national agitation against the Tory governments of George III which got underway in support of the journalist John Wilkes, and later blossomed in opposition to the American war. Ralph's best friend at this time was probably Bartholemew Rudd of Marske, with whom he shot partridges. There were also the sporting vicar of Marske, the Revd. Lascelles, and his brother, Capt. Lascelles, who owned a pack of hounds, and with whom he went coursing hares. Ralph thought nothing of riding thirty or forty miles to meet friends or business contacts. He also made several longer journeys by coach or post chaise, for instance, to Liverpool, Buxton and London. In the summer of 1770 he and his servant even "set out for London, to ride our

horses all the way”, but as the weather turned out particularly wet they eventually gave up and finished the journey in a chaise.

In 1769 Ralph Jackson became a magistrate which involved him in a range of duties including licensing pubs and supervising the repair of highways, as well as criminal proceedings. His first duty was to question a woman who had been made pregnant by an alum worker from Guisborough but unfortunately the man concerned disappeared before he could be charged with her maintenance. Occasionally he followed up his cases by travelling to York to attend the trials of those he had committed to a higher court. His care in always listing the names of his fellow magistrates shows how much he enjoyed being on the bench, and mixing with the local gentry.

Ralph had cousins whom he visited at intervals, such as John Pease of Whitby and Matty Reid of Yarm, though it is difficult to establish their precise relationship with him. One of his mother’s uncles, Joshua, who had recently died, had been nationally famous, or rather notorious, as a ‘quack doctor’ (according to the Dictionary of National Biography), and the inventor of Ward’s ‘White drop for the scurvy’, which Ralph sometimes recommended to others, or even took himself. Ralph’s elderly mother was living with him, and he planned to install her in a house which he bought for her in Great Ayton, but she died before she could be moved. But his unmarried sister Esther did live in Ayton, and so did William Wilson, married to his sister Rachel, who had bought Ayton Hall after retiring from the East India Company. The Wilsons had five children, and Ralph, who clearly admired his older brother-in-law, saw a good deal of the whole family, frequently staying the night with them, or having them stay with him. He records events affecting them, particularly their illnesses, usually treated by his own doctor, young Doctor Wayne from Stokesley.

Ralph Jackson was interested in the latest developments in science. He went to Stockton to hear a lecture on electricity, and he owned his own telescope. On the third of June, 1769, there is a pleasing glimpse of him in his garden in Guisborough observing through his reflecting telescope the transit of Venus across the sun, while on the other side of the world, in Tahiti, Captain Cook and Joseph Banks were trying to do the same thing. And in due course Cook, having finished his voyage, and having recently married, brought his young wife to Ayton to stay with the Wilsons. Ralph must have been especially interested in this visit as shortly before that Richard Pickersgill, who had sailed on the *Endeavour* with Cook, had stayed with him for over a fortnight.

TRANSCRIBING THE DIARIES

The youthful Ralph Jackson’s handwriting, spelling and punctuation provide plenty of problems for those who transcribe his diaries, but all three much improved as he grew older. We have tried here to reproduce exactly what he wrote and have resisted the temptation to make changes in the interests of clarity. The result is, we hope, an authentic and accurate transcription, although Jackson’s precise meaning occasionally takes a bit of working out, especially as he is rather fond of abbreviations and superscripts.

In the following text, square brackets enclose the page numbers of the original manuscript, e.g. [Book F; p.17].

Other editorial matter is also in square brackets, such as indicating a blank in the manuscript: [*blank*]; or reference to an unreadable word: [?].

There are also a few editorial footnotes.

Round brackets () are always Jackson’s own brackets.

^ ^ enclose words which Jackson inserted later above the line.

Jackson's use of capital letters seems rather arbitrary to the modern reader, as was common at the time, but we have kept these as he wrote them. We have also tried to retain the punctuation of the original. He relies heavily on commas and the occasional semi-colon, but is very sparing on full stops, although frequently it is difficult to distinguish between his commas and his full stops.

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¹ *Bound for the Tyne*, published by the Company of Hostmen of Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle, 2000.

² *Selected Accounts of an 18th Century Local Country Gentleman*, published by I. A. Alexander, Guisborough, n.d.