

## The Postgate School

### (Part of a chapter from “Great Ayton – A History of the Village by Dan O’Sullivan”)

The first mention of a school in the village comes in a document quoted by Ord which states:

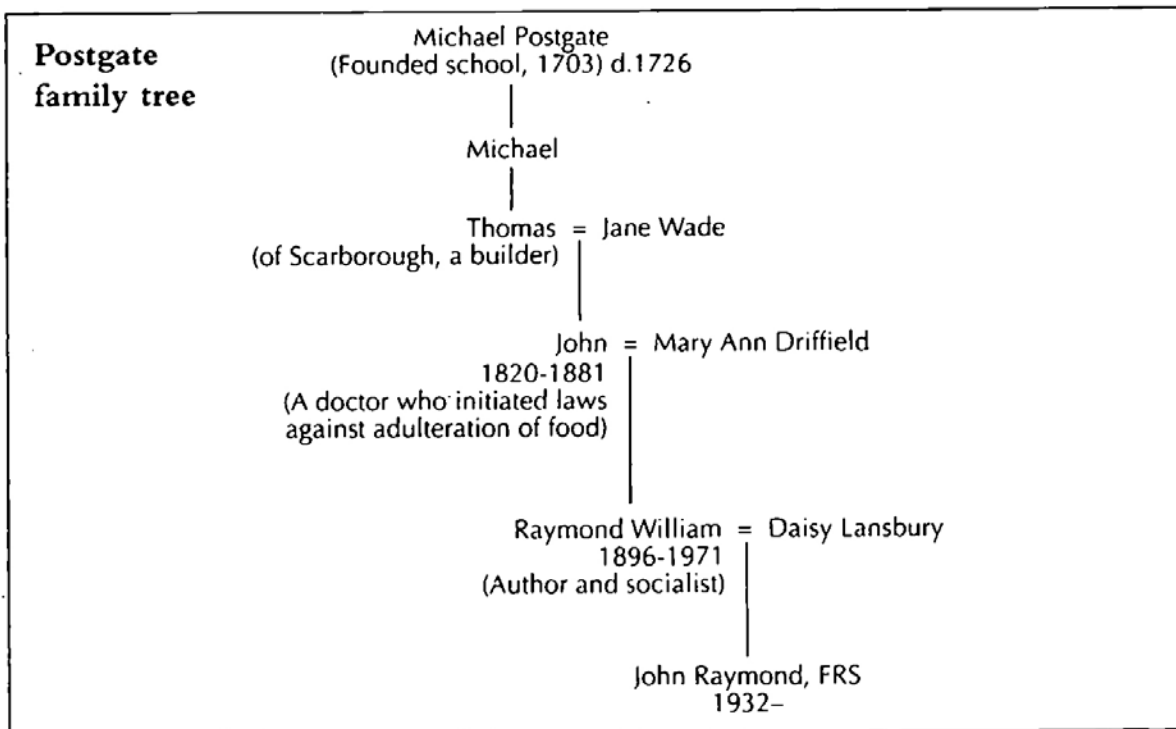
*In the year 1704 did Michael Postgate build a single room for a school-house, and chambered it, with a salary of £4 a year to the master for teaching eight poor boys, he being a widower and having no children by his former wife. But it so happened, two or three years after, his age then supposed to be between 70 and 80, that he married a second wife and by her had a son upon which he ceased the payment of the £4, but confirmed the house and ground a free gift.*

Just because there is no record of any school in the village before this date does not mean, of course, that there was no education at all. Research into other towns and villages in England has shown that many schoolmasters - mainly unlicensed and therefore not appearing in the official church records - were active during the seventeenth century. Also, it was in this century that the basic illiteracy rate started to go down sharply, among males at least. One way of measuring the number of people who were literate in a particular period is to examine every available surviving document which people had to sign, and see whether, in fact, they did sign their names, or just put their mark. I have not done this for Ayton, but even a cursory glance at the records show that there were plenty of villagers who could sign their names before the date that formal schooling got under way. For instance, out of nine people who signed the petition against William Stockton the troublemaker in 1706 (see page 50), eight - including Michael Postgate - could write their name, and only one, Henry Grey, had to make a mark. Someone must have taught these people their letters (although it is true that the ability to sign one's name did not mean one was necessarily a fluent writer).

To return to the Postgate school, this was typical of many small schools that were being founded at the time, up and down the country. The *Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge* had been founded in 1689, with the object of inculcating the children of the poor with sound religious principles. Unfortunately very little is known about the founder of this particular school.

The Postgate family were considerable landowners in the village during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and there seems to have been at least one Michael in every generation. At the beginning of the eighteenth century we know that there were at least two, because Michael Postgate, senior, was buried in 1726. Also, in two documents dated 1708 and 1716 respectively (see page 119), both Michaels sign their names in various capacities. It is very possible that the founder of the school was the same Michael Postgate who was in trouble with the law two years running for his Jacobite views. In 1694 *Michael Postgate of Great Ayton* was fined £3/6/8d. at Stokesley Quarter Sessions for *uttering sedition and scandalous words namely, 'This King William has ruined us all'*. The following October he and others were charged with trying to force Matthew Yoward of Stokesley to drink King James's health. At this time the Whigs were in power nationally, and discontented Tories were looking to King James, 'the King over the water', rather than to Dutch William, who had been brought to England to supplant James II in 1689. Generally speaking, the Tories were the High Church party, so that someone holding the views expressed by this Michael Postgate might very well have later founded a school to teach good Anglican principles and perhaps try to halt the pernicious influence of 'Dissent' from spreading.

Professor John Postgate FRS has traced his family tree back to the Postgate who founded the school. According to him the connection went like this:



The Postgate School flourished, and was soon charging a small fee and catering for more than the *eight poor boys* it was founded for. In 1743 the Rev. Ralph Jackson reported, *generally twenty or thirty children are taught in it*. This, as everyone knows, was the school which James Cook attended after he was brought to Ayton at about the age of eight. At this time - 1736, or thereabouts - his father moved from Marton to be farm manager to Thomas Skottowe, the owner of Aireyholme Farm, and Skottowe paid for James to attend the Postgate School, where he would have been taught writing, arithmetic and his catechism. There is some doubt about whom his school master might have been. M. Heavisides, going on oral tradition, thinks it was George Pulleyn, and this is repeated by biographers of Cook such as J.C. Beaglehole. But Kettlewell says it was William Rowland, and a William Rowland was churchwarden in 1740-41.

We know the name of only one of Cook's companions at the school, Thomas Bloyd. Bloyd later moved to Sunderland, went to sea and became Master of the vessel, *The Three Sisters*, with which Cook's ship, *The Grenville*, happened to collide in the mouth of the Thames, in 1767. It is recounted that the collision resulted in a good deal of bad language, but no doubt the two Masters enjoyed reminiscing over their schooldays once the recriminations were over!

Graves has quite a lot to say about Cook at Ayton but it is somewhat unreliable, having been written down several generations later. He says, for instance, that Cook was very strong-minded and individualistic, so that, when the other boys planned *juvenile excursions* such as bird-nesting he would not join in, thus becoming rather unpopular. Graves concludes:

*At the age of thirteen years his proficiency in writing and the common rules of arithmetic was such as was thought sufficient to qualify him for a country shopkeeper. He was accordingly bound to Mr William Sanderson, a shop-keeper at Staithes.*

Very likely it was Thomas Skottowe that got James Cook the post with Sanderson. There are indications that the two men were linked in various ways; for instance, it is probably no coincidence that William Sanderson's son was later to serve as surgeon on a ship commanded by Thomas Skottowe's son, Nicholas. Sanderson was also one of the trustees of a fund for his granddaughter set up by Thomas Skottowe.

Unfortunately, the actual schoolroom used by Cook was pulled down in 1785, so that, although the Postgate School itself continued, the present building containing the museum - started in 1928 - is not the same. The document quoted by Ord explains what happened:

*William Boys and Thomas Hugill happened to be overseers of the poor of Great Ayton in 1785—6, in which time land-produce increased so much in its price as gave the poor people a handle for craving additional support, very grievous to be borne, daily threatening they would apply to the justices for relief in a manner quite inconsistent with reason. (!) To redress similar cases elsewhere, and ease the burthen, poor-houses were growing more arid more common every day on which Ayton resolved immediately to build one, and follow the rest. On the very ground given by Michael Postgate was there a little dwelling, erected at the cost of an old neighbour and his wife, viz. £20 and £10 added by subscription. The sum of £100 was then raised by assessment, the interest to be given for teaching four poor boys, and rebuilding the premises. Accordingly the school-house built by Michael Postgate, and the house for the master to dwell in, were both taken down, and all the materials wrought up in the general building, valued £10.*

*To render the work effective, it became evident that a further sum of £100 was required, whereupon I proposed, that if eight would join in the work, myself would be one of the eight to raise the sum, which being known, the number soon enlarged to eleven, which reduced our proportions of the sum to £9/2s. a man.*

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| <i>Money raised by 11 men of landed property</i>             | <i>£100-0-0</i>     |
| <i>By a general rate on landowners, already mentioned</i>    | <i>£100-0-0</i>     |
| <br>   |                     |
| <i>Total sum for building poor-house and school</i>          | <i>£200-0-0</i>     |
| <i>Materials of old school-house and dwelling, valued at</i> | <i>£10-0-0</i>      |
| <i>Two legacies left by Ann Stockton, £10 each</i>           | <i>£20-0-0</i>      |
| <i>Two legacies by an old neighbour and his wife</i>         | <i>£20-0-0</i>      |
|  | <br><i>£250-0-0</i> |

*The interest of this sum, viz. £10- 10s., to be paid yearly to a schoolmaster, for teaching poor boys, by the overseers of the poor of Great Ayton. The three new houses, built on the old site, to be let to poor inhabitants of the place, at the rent of 16s. 8d. each house.*

A government report of 1820 largely confirms the above document, though there are variations in detail, for example, over the schoolmaster's salary:

*The schoolmaster is appointed by the inhabitants of the township, and receives a salary of £10-6-0d. per annum, of which the sum of £4- 10-0d. is paid out of the rent of the Scarborough Poor Land appropriated to that purpose, with the consent of the inhabitants of the township, about 30 years ago, and £5-16-0d. out of the poor rates, the latter being paid according to an arrangement made in 1785, the time of building the poor house, as interest of £20 given or advanced for building three cottages for the poor of the parish, and £100 subscribed for building the poor house.. The schoolmaster has also the use of an apartment and a garret over it in the poor house.*

So it seems that in 1786 £250 was collected which was used to build a new, upstairs schoolroom with a *poor house* underneath it. From the account book of the Overseers of the poor we know that this had a common sitting room and a common work room. There was a table of indigence where free meals were provided, and a *table of industry* where meals - presumably better ones - were paid for at the rate of 1/- per person per week. There were also sleeping apartments, or cubicles, but everyone admitted had to have their own *Bid-stead, Bid and Bidding, and such other Furniture as they wished*, and also their own candles. Inmates had to *provide their own Cloaths, wash their own and Childrens apparel, to make their own Beds, sweep their own Rooms, and shall at all times, keep themselves, children and apartments, very decent and clean.* For more details about life in the poor house, see page 68.

In addition there were built next door a row of three cottages to be let out cheaply to poor families. Actually, according to Graves, these cottages were first built in 1764, but were taken down and rebuilt in 1785. In return for acquiring all this accommodation for its poor the parish from now on had an obligation to pay the schoolmaster's wages out of the poor rates — although in fact, as the document above explains, only part of the wages was on the rates, and the rest came from a village charity called the Scarborough Poor Land.

These arrangements show that at this time little distinction was made between education and poor relief. The theory was that free - or cheap - schooling was a way of providing for the children of the poor, so that ultimately they would be able to earn their own living and not be a burden on the rates. Another striking thing about the building of the poor house is the generous scale of private contributions. A hundred pounds then was the equivalent of many thousands today.

Among schoolmasters whose names are mentioned in the parish records are James Harrison, John Marton, and Martin Belcher. Belcher seems to have been a customs official for a period, and then was appointed schoolmaster at Newby, where there was a village school founded by John Coulson. For the last few years of his life he was a pauper, supported by the parish of Ayton, and he died in 1804, being survived by his wife, Miriam. Another schoolmaster was Humphrey Sanderson, a member of a large Ayton family, intermarried with the Fawcetts and the Bulmers. Sanderson was Master of the Postgate School, and also Assistant Overseer of the Poor, from 1823 till his death in 1848, aged 71, *after 25 years of diligent, faithful and correct service with the parish*. His successor as master was Stephen Hunter, from Scarborough, and as Assistant Overseer, Joseph Longstaffe. Humphrey Sanderson was survived by his wife, Mary, and their sandstone headstone, crumbling fast, is the last one on the left before one enters the porch of All Saints. His son, William, later became Master at the British School.

The Postgate School steadily increased in size. In 1819 a government report described it as follows:

*A school containing 7 or 8 children, the master of whom through the influence of the Quakers receives £5/16/- out of the parish rates, and a yearly rent of land near Scarborough of £8 per annum, with a schoolroom and cottage, and instructs about 30 other children.*

This report also mentions three other schools in the village: *A school for boys containing 30, and two for girls in which 46 are instructed*, but it concludes:

*The poor are desirous of having more sufficient means of education, and there are few places where it would be more desirable, or likely to be more beneficial, to establish a school on the national system, as from 400 to 500 children would be found in and near the parish anxious to attend it.*

A few years later, another report lists three daily schools in Ayton. One was the Postgate School, which now had 48 boys and six girls attending it, another had 33 boys and one girl, and the third (started in 1830) had 21 girls. *The children in these schools (with the exception of the 8 in the first mentioned) are instructed at the expense of their parents*. By this date there was also an infant school, for 10 boys and 20 to 26 girls, which had been started in 1830 by Thomas Richardson, *who provides a schoolroom and guarantees the mistress 7/- per week. The children pay 2d. each per week*. However, *The schoolroom is very inconvenient and another cannot be met with, so that the system has not been so useful as it might be made*. The report also mentions a new educational feature - two Sunday schools, one attended by 75 boys and the other by 74 girls. Nevertheless, it concludes, *All the schools in the parish are very defective owing to the want of fit persons as teachers*. The population of the village at this time was about 1,000, but of course the schools mentioned would also have served the surrounding area, including Newton and Nunthorpe, neither of which had a day school. So by the 1830s Ayton was not particularly well off educationally, but this was about to change.

## Footnotes

(see "**Great Ayton – A History of the Village by Dan O’Sullivan**")

1 Ord,p.414

2 NYCRO QSB, 1694

3 Personal communication from Prof. John Postgate

4 M. Heavisides, *Rambles in Cleveland*, Stockton 1909, P. 73; Kettlewell, P. 1

5 Graves, P. 459

6 Graves, P. 456

7 C. E.Thornton, 'The Scottowe Family ofAyton', CTLHS no. 35, P. 13

8 Ord,p.414

9 Charity Commissioners' Reports, 1819-37

10 Select Vestry Minutes, NYCRO PR/AYG 4/4

11 A field of 3 acres at Falsgrave was left to the poor of Great Ayton by Elizabeth Bulson, and half the rent of £9 a year was to go to *a schoolmaster ofAyton*. However, the Charity Commissioners could not trace the original will; Charity Commissioners' Reports, 1819-1837

12 NYCRO PR/AYG 4/4

13 Parliamentary Papers 1819 IX

14 Parliamentary Papers 1833 XLIII

15 Dixon, pp. 19-22. The following section is also mainly from *The Jubilee History*

16 *The Cleveland Repertory and Stokesley Advertise*, Jan. 1843

17 Kettlewell, p.13

18 NYCRO ZDU (Marwood)