

## Jemima Cummings, a lady who likely had a very bad reputation in Ayton in the mid-1800s.

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Illegitimate births within Ayton were not uncommon in the 1800s. However, Jemima perhaps took illegitimacy to an extreme – she had 8 illegitimate children in an eighteen year period of 1820-1838.

In the baptismal records of the children Jemima's occupations were described as servant, 4 instances; prostitute one instance; single woman, 2 instances. In the 1841 census she is described as 'works in the fields'.

Jemima herself was an only child of an unmarried woman, Phyllis Cummings, a resident of Ayton and was baptised in All Saints Church on Jan. 26<sup>th</sup> 1797. In the year that Jemima was born Phyllis required financial help from the Overseers of the Poor and she received 13 week's payments of 1/6d and as part of the same entry in the accounts Doctor's fees for her were paid for £3 6 6d. Unfortunately the Overseers of the Poor records do not have specific dates we cannot ascertain whether the Doctor's treatment / attention related to Jemima's birth or some other problem.

The baptismal records from the All Saints Church records for Jemima's children are:

Year	Date	Name	Parent	Residence	Occupation	Minister
1820	Jan 30	John illegitimate son of Jemima Cummings		Nunthorpe	Servant	Wm. Deason
1822		Elizabeth illegitimate dau. of Jemima Cummings		Stokesley	Servant	Wm. Deason
1823	Dec 25	Robert illegitimate son of Jemima Cummings		Nunthorpe	Servant	Wm. Deason
1826	Oct 15	Hannah illegitimate dau. of Jemima Cummings		Ayton	Servant	Joseph Ibbetson
1829	Nov 1	Isaac illegitimate son of Jemima Cummings		Ayton	Servant	Joseph Ibbetson
1833	Jul 30	Joseph illegitimate son of Jemima Cummings		Ayton	Prostitute	Joseph Ibbetson
1835	Apr 19	Mary illegitimate dau. of Jemima Cummings		Ayton	Single Woman	Joseph Ibbetson
1838	Jul 15	Elizabeth illegitimate dau. of Jemima Cummings		Ayton	Single Woman	Joseph Ibbetson

Note that the second child Elizabeth, born 1822, died in 1824 and was buried in All Saints Churchyard.

We know from the above church records that Jemima lived in Great Ayton from 1826 to 1838, additionally the 1841 census records for the village record the following –

Jemima Cummings	Head of household	Aged 40	'Works in the fields'
Isaac Cummings	Son	aged 11	
Joseph Cummings	Son	aged 8	
Mary Cummings	Dau.	aged 6	
Elizabeth Cummings	Dau.	aged 3	

In this same census Jemima's son Robert, aged 17, was working as a farm servant for John Barker at Blackmoor.

So where was Jemima and family living in Ayton? The 1841 Census enumerator's entries, often not necessarily the same order as the properties, has Jemima near the Flour Mill and the Red Lion. From the Flour Mill there are 6 properties to the Red Lion and Jemima's property is the 5<sup>th</sup> property from the Red Lion PH. This would place Jemima's property around the east end of what is now Race Terrace.

By the time of the 1851 census Jemima had left Ayton and from Ancestry.co.uk searches Jemima and some of her family are were found at Stranton (around what we know as West Hartlepool).

Jemima, in moving to another area where her past life will unlikely be known, she transforms herself from a single mother with seven living children and falsely becomes a widow. Isaac, 22, Ag. Lab; Elizabeth, 13, Scholar are living with Jemima and next door is her eldest son John and his wife Isabella, occupation Straw Bonnet Maker. By the 1871 census for this area Jemima has moved away and John and Isabella have three young children: Sarah aged 7; Isaac aged 3 and John H. aged 6 months. John and Isabella were still in the Stranton area until 1891 by which time their daughter Sarah had married and given birth to a son Fred Herbert and was living with John and Isabella. At this time John was 70 and Isabella 68.

With the benefit of hindsight, what would a modern day Aytonian make of Jemima's lifestyle? Unfortunately there is no evidence of the names of the men in Jemima's life; did she have her children by several men or just one? We will never know, but perhaps that is how it should be.

On the plus side Jemima brought up her 7 children over a period of 20 years when presumably she was the principal wage earner providing the money to feed, clothe and home her children. None of her occupations would yield high incomes and she would have not had the benefit of our current Social Security payments. Considering her circumstances she did very well for her offspring. Illegitimate births were not uncommon in Ayton at this time; it's just that Jemima had so many that makes her unique! There maybe some evidence in the Parish records that Jemima was considered with affection, note that following the Minister Joseph Ibbetson referring Jemima's occupation being a prostitute, the following next two entries are much kinder when she is referred to a Single Woman, nearly as kind as a woman in these circumstances being referred to as a Spinster.