

Religion - Other Denominations

A chapter from "Great Ayton – A History of the Village by Dan O'Sullivan"

Congregationalists, etc.

Great Ayton has for long had the reputation of being a religious village, and particularly one in which the different branches of the Christian church flourished, and lived amicably together. However, non-conformity in the village may have first arisen in more turbulent times. The Commonwealth period (1649-1660) saw a struggle between traditional churchmen and Presbyterians! Puritans, who wanted radical reform, and, according to Kettlewell, *there can be little doubt that these Puritans penetrated to Ayton in the troublous times of the English Civil Wars, and for a time the movement must have occupied the parish church itself.* Thomas Edwards, curate of Ayton, was ejected during the Commonwealth but re-instated at the restoration of Charles II, so he, presumably was royalist and anti-Puritan. On the other hand, George Evanke (or Eubanke) was turned out of the Ayton curacy at the Restoration, so he might have been a Puritan. Then a little later there was Cornelius Cockburne (curate from 1662 to 1679) who may have changed sides, because he was *thought to have been a Presbyterian before he became curate of Ayton.* Unfortunately not much has survived relating to these conflicts, and these three curates are little more to us than names. The burials of Edwards and Cockburne, and also of their respective wives, are recorded in the Ayton parish registers.

Nothing more is known about Presbyterianism until the end of the seventeenth century, when the Quarter Sessions records show official sanction being given for certain houses to be set aside for Presbyterian worship. By this time there was qualified toleration for those who disagreed with the Church of England. Such people, known as dissenters or non-conformists, were granted freedom of worship by the Toleration Act of 1689. But they were still not allowed to hold any office in central or local government, and this state of affairs continued until 1828.

In and around Ayton there was a small group of these dissenters, and they had sympathisers in the Coulson and Skottowe families, successively lords of the manor of Ayton. John Coulson the younger was a merchant of South Shields who settled at Ayton Hall after he succeeded to John, his father's estate in 1674, and he built a room onto the back of the Hall to be a meeting house for his Presbyterian friends. This is probably the *new house* to which the following statement from the Quarter Sessions records refers; it can still be seen today, though drastically altered:

Hemsley, January 14, 1707/8

These are to satisfy whom it may Concern, that a new house in Great Ayton in Cleavelands in the County of York built and erected at the Charges of Mr. John Coulson of South Shields Merchant is designed and intended as a meeting place for the Religious Worship of Protestant Dissenters.

Another such house at Ayton, *the house of John Leavens*, was similarly recorded the same year, and another in Newton belonging to John Jolly. One of this early group of Presbyterians was David Seaton, junior, described as a *dissenting preacher* when he was in trouble at the Quarter Sessions in 1707 for *uttering a profane curse*, and another was Peter Donaldson, who is said to have come to the area from Scotland at the end of the previous century. It was this Peter Donaldson's son who in 1743 helped build a proper Presbyterian meeting house in the village, as opposed to a mere room in a private house. Peter Donaldson, junior, was land steward to Nicholas Skottowe - by now the Skottowes had succeeded the Coulsons as lords of Ayton manor and proprietors of Ayton Hall. Skottowe and Donaldson built the chapel in Back Row, behind the High Street and next to the river. Still standing today, this is a fine example of an eighteenth-century dissenting chapel. It consists of a large, rectangular hall, in local stone, and when a chapel it had a gallery at one end and a lectern raised on a wooden platform at the other. Incidentally, from that date until a few years ago the Donaldson family have continued to farm in the parish, and the present Walter Donaldson can trace his descent back to the seventeenth century.

The first minister for this chapel was the Rev. Porteous, who may have come from Nuneaton, and who was buried in All Saints churchyard in 1751. During the second half of the eighteenth century a regular congregation of Presbyterians attended the chapel, but the services were taken by visiting preachers, or ministers from Guisborough. However, the Rev. Logan, who was a friend of Ralph Jackson (see page 61) appears to have lived in the village. It is said that during the ministry of Logan, who died in about 1813, the congregation became Unitarian. He was succeeded by the Rev. Hinmers, who came from Guisborough to be minister and who served the chapel until his death in 1846. The baptismal register of this chapel, between 1763 and 1836, shows that, while certain Ayton

families such as Donaldson, Jilly and Harklas, remained members over generations, the chapel also catered for members over a wide catchment area, from Loftus to Hilton.

Subsequently, the chapel became a Congregational one, and in 1879 a new house was built at its front for the resident minister. The house was named after Hinmers, and both name and date could, until recently, be seen on its facade, which faces the stone bridge. From now on, the history of this Congregational chapel is continuous, and there was a flourishing social activity and Sunday school connected with it. However, after the second world war the congregation steadily declined until there were only six left. In 1979 the story of Congregationalism in Ayton came to an end; both parts of the chapel are now in private hands. Miss Ruth Frankland, who died a few years ago, was perhaps its last surviving member.

Methodists

Another branch of the Christian church which has been important in the village for some considerable time is Methodism. There is no record of John Wesley having visited Ayton, but he must have passed through it frequently as he visited both Stokesley and Guisborough several times. The first mention of Methodism in Ayton comes from the parish registers which record that in 1807 a child of William Galloway, *Methodist Preacher and grocer* was baptised, and also another belonging to Richard Trenholme, *Methodist Preacher*. Yet another preacher, John Fisher, a shoemaker from Seamer, was buried at All Saints in 1809. But of course at this date Methodists still regarded themselves as members of the Church of England, and would not have kept their own records. However, by 1815 there was a separate Methodist society in the village, with 24 members. William Galloway, and also his wife, Ann (née Fawcett), appear in the records as class leaders in Ayton during the 1820s. Ayton was part of the Stokesley Methodist circuit (separated from the Whitby circuit in 1813). The Ayton membership grew fast - in 1819 there were 38 members, and in 1827, 67. Among these early members were John Kilvington, excise officer; John Harbottle, carpenter; William Calvert, weaver, and Joseph Bean, draper.

The village's first Methodist chapel, which has now been converted into the two last houses at the west end of Race Terrace, opened in about 1810. It was closed in 1862 after the new Wesleyan Methodist chapel was built in Waterfall Terrace. This in turn ceased to be a chapel in 1914, and it was then bought for the village by Sir John Pease Fry. It is now the Village Hall, owned by the Great Ayton Dramatic Society, and is where the parish council hold their monthly meetings. The present Methodist chapel was opened in 1913.

The Primitive Methodist connection broke away from the Wesleyans in 1812. William Clowes, one of the founders of the movement, who had been expelled from the Wesleyans in 1810, toured Cleveland in 1821. He reports his visit to Ayton - presumably Great Ayton, as his next port of call was Potto, and then Stokesley - as follows:

I then went on to Ayton, and occupied a barn: it was so full that I could hardly get in, but many of the uncircumcised were present, and manifested every symptom of mischief. I waited on the Lord a short time, desiring him to calm the roaring of the foe, and he did so; in preaching again I had my full freedom; we soon had twenty in society and the Lord opened our ways, and we got a new chapel . . .

This *new chapel*, the village's first Primitive Methodist chapel, was opened the following year on the site of a house on Guisborough Road almost opposite the church. It is marked as a chapel on the 1856 Ordnance Survey map. Until recently the village police station was on this site. By 1834 the 'Prims' had 34 members in the village, and no doubt the growth of California further increased membership. In 1895 a new chapel was built on Newton Road, nearer to where the bulk of the congregation would have lived. This chapel has since become the Rosehill Theatre, where pupils of Ayton School put on their productions. Older villagers can remember the annual Whitsuntide procession of the Primitive Methodists from Rosehill through the village, before their summer camp on the Low Green. The movement was reunited with the Methodists in 1932, and today Methodism is a major force in the village, centred on the new chapel and its adjoining hall.

Quakers

George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, died in 1691, and there have been Quakers in the village since before that date. In 1689, shortly after the Act of Toleration allowed dissenters to worship in certain registered premises, the magistrates at Thirsk issued to the Quakers at Ayton a certificate allowing them to establish a place of worship, along with similar certificates for Guisborough, Stokesley, Broughton and Carlton. Like the Presbyterians of this time the Quakers probably used a room in a private house for their worship. One of those who did so must have been the *Maurice Calvert of Ayton (A Quaker,)* who was buried in Stokesley in 1699. But in 1700 a piece of land at

the corner of the High Green was purchased by Quaker trustees in order to build a proper meeting-house. The deed states that Elizabeth Clarke of Ingleby Greenhow, widow, conveyed to John Hardin (called *of Killdill* in a later deed), William Richardson and John Ward (later called *of Whitby, grocer*).

one old house or front stead with old timber now standing upon the same with eight yards on the back side, situate, lying and being in Great Ayton, joining up with the dwelling house of Elizabeth Clarke on the north, on the premises of James Stockton on the south, on the common street on the west, and on the garth of the said Elizabeth Clarke on the east, and now late in the occupation of William Ridsdale, tenant to the said Elizabeth Clarke, together with all privileges, rights, titles, etc. ,for a convenience to build a meeting house for the use and services of the people of God called Quakers, and for that use and service forever. Signed: Elizabeth Clarke (mark only). Witnesses: Richd. Ableson, Rbt Sheilds (mark only), John Richardson.

In 1722 the old trustees conveyed this property to another set of trustees who were: Thomas Pennitt of Stokesley, mercer, Thomas Masterman of Nunthorpe, John Richardson, William Richardson junior and Micah Shields, all of Ayton, yeomen.

From the records of the Guisborough Monthly Meeting, of which Ayton formed part, we know quite a lot about these eighteenth-century Quakers, whose influence in the village steadily increased, as did their numbers. Quakers were highly organised and had a very strong social conscience. They looked after the poor, gave freely to good causes, and visited the sick and the elderly. Another admirable quality was their insistence on an independent role for women in the movement. George Fox said that there were *many things women may do and speak of amongst women which is not men's business*; hence there was a separate women's monthly meeting to which Ayton regularly sent representatives. A Quaker such as Self Pennit, the wife of Thomas Pennit of Ayton, played an important role, frequently making visits to Friends in other parts of the country, and reporting back to the meeting on what she found. The Pennits were undoubtedly by the end of the eighteenth century one of the most prosperous families in the village. In 1780 all those persons who had male servants were taxed, and in Ayton Thomas Pennet was one of only four people to whom this applied.

When two Quakers wanted to marry there was quite an elaborate procedure to be gone through before permission was granted. This included visits to both parties by senior members, and written statements of their intentions, which had to be read out to the meeting. Quakers were also very strict, not to say, intolerant, when it came to their own conduct. The records are full of members getting reprimanded, or expelled, from the movement for a range of behaviour including making idle gossip, being drowsy in Meeting, using *goods suspected to be run* (i.e. smuggled), or, above all, having relationships with non-Quakers, or with the established church. To enter a *steeple house*, and to have one's children *sprinkled*, were the derogatory Quaker terms for going to church and holding a baptism. In 1815, for example, it was stated that *William Martin has formed a connection with a young woman not of our society. William Coning, Caleb Fletcher and William Baker are appointed to pay him a visit and report to our next meeting.* This heavy treatment, however, did not work. The next meeting was told that although *they endeavoured to labour with him . . the visit was not to satisfaction.* Shortly afterwards it was reported that William Martin •had been married by a priest, and consequently was *disowned* by the Society. In 1791 an entire family, the Mastermans of Guisborough, were expelled, the husband for not paying his debts, the wife for never attending Meetings, and the daughter for getting herself pregnant.

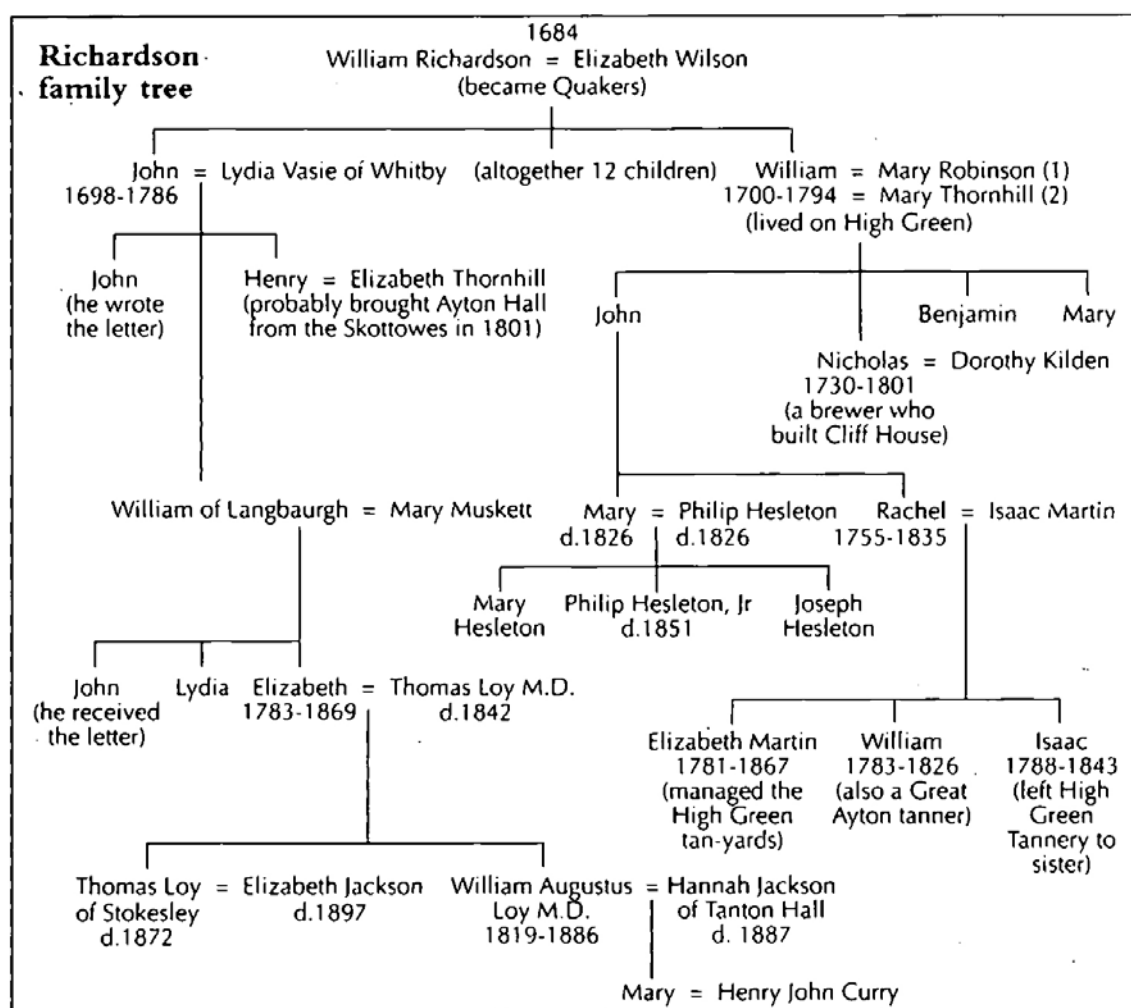
The Quaker John William Rowntree, writing in 1906, castigated *the suicidal madness of casting out Friends for marrying outsiders, which came near to extinguishing the Society.* He made a distinction between the early Quakers, who were prepared to suffer physical violence as well as public humiliation for their beliefs, and their eighteenth-century successors, who were much more cautious, more respectable and introverted, and whose role seemed to have been taken over at this juncture by the more adventurous Methodists:

Timidly the Quaker peeps over his hedge of prickly cactus, willing that his plain cloth of sleek broadcloth should be taken for simplicity, but loath indeed to take it off like the Methodist, and preach to a storming crowd at the street corner He is careful to avoid debts and financial disgrace, ponderous in the sobriety of his language and the dullness of his intellect. His culture is narrow, his outlook small; his dinners are good, and his worship somnolent.

Because Quakers almost always married other Quakers, the membership tended to remain over a long period within certain extended families, interlinked with one another through numerous marriage alliances. Ralph Jackson, in the

document of 1743 quoted earlier, records four Quaker families in the village. (His additional statement, *None among the Quakers but travellers*, is rather mysterious if it means there was no Quaker minister living in the village, because Quakers did not have ministers.) Fifty years later, a list of the members in 1793 shows that there were 62 Quakers in the village. However, this included children of all ages, and the list was dominated by three families, the Richardsons, the Martins, and the Mastermans of Nunthorpe, who together had over half the membership. Another characteristic of well-to-do Quaker families was that they tended to employ Quakers as servants whenever possible. Hence, in the mid-nineteenth century the Ayton society included the Conings - William Coning was gardener to Thomas Richardson - and the Dales - William Dale was assistant to the shop-keeper, Jeremiah Thistlethwaite, who himself became a Quaker in 1857.

One of Jackson's four families were certainly the Richardsons of Langbaurch, farmers and tanners. William Richardson of Ayton married Elizabeth Wilson of Whitby in 1684, and shortly afterwards both became Quakers. One of William's sons, John, inherited Langbaurch farm, not from his father (who lived on the High Green), but from his uncle, John. In middle-age this uncle wrote a long letter to his nephew, all about what life had been like at Langbaurch at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The following extract from the Richardson family tree - which is extremely complicated- shows the original William who became a Quaker, as well as the two Johns, uncle and nephew. It also shows some of the Ayton families to which the Richardsons were related by marriage: Hesletons, Martins and Loys.



The letter from John Richardson was written in 1756 but refers to conditions over half a century earlier, when William and Elizabeth were at Langbaurch. It points out some of the difficulties facing the Quakers at that time, one of which being that, as they disapproved of alcohol, they could not in all conscience support the malt trade:

Before I can remember my father had built a malt-kiln near to his little tan-house. There was a good pump which supplied his lead cisterns for steeping his corn, as well as his cisterns for tanning, and all things, to appearance, went on with good success. Although he had no great stock, he could get what money he thought proper to venture in trade. Things looked as though the advance of the income might answer the outlies of an increasing family. But this malt trade was soon overturned, for our mother, as it was her daily

care to want to know what to do and what to leave undone, she thought it her duty to advise her husband to let go that prospect of profit though it seemed considerable, and need of it to bring up so great a family. I can remember, although thy father and I were so young that we were not fit to go anywhere with a horse, her saying to my father, 'If these lads live, and if this malt-kiln be kept on, they may, likely, be sent to ale-houses with malt; and if they should get in the habit of drinking, what will all we can get signify? I have no fear but Providence will provide for us and, them if we do as we ought. Let us be content with the tanning trade.'

So the malting equipment was sold off and the Richardsons concentrated on tanning. Now, however, another crisis loomed up, this time due to the Quaker principle that oath-taking was against the will of God:

It happened that suddenly things took an unfavourable turn for the tanning trade, which involved the family in trouble and perplexity, that being their only visible means for a livelihood. A duty was laid upon leather and the government required an oath to be taken on entering leather; when taken out of the pit to dry ... This soon became a close trial. Either the command of Christ must be broken, or they must leave off the tanning trade, or in a little time have all the stock they had taken away by fines for not submitting to the law.

In 1702, however, this problem also disappeared as the government then allowed Quakers to make a simple affirmation which avoided having to invoke the name of God, as in an oath, and so the fines ceased. The Richardsons of Langbaugh prospered and became one of the village's wealthiest families, owning not only large tanneries but also the mill at the west end of the village.

Ralph Jackson, the diarist, writing towards the end of the eighteenth century, knew several Ayton Quaker, including William Richardson, then in his eighties, his wife, Mary and their daughter-in-law, Dorothy. William Richardson was a tough old man who went out in all weathers, and enjoyed disputing with his co-religionist, the rival tanner, Isaac Martin. Although himself an Anglican, Ralph Jackson attended the Quaker meeting-house on the High Green on at least one occasion (20th July, 1780).

By the middle of the nineteenth century, and with the founding of the Friends' School, the numbers of Ayton Quakers went up considerably, as the figures quoted earlier for religious worship in 1851 prove. The various families - Peases, Dixons, Thistlethwaites, Richardsons, Martins and others - put down roots in the area, and as they all had strong principles their influence was marked. However, they still had, as Quakers, one quarrel with the establishment, and this was over the payment of tithes, the local church tax. As George Dixon, headmaster of the school (and in charge of the school farm), explained, some Quakers managed to side-step this problem while others were too scrupulous to do so:

When the time came for the annual payment of tithe, a demand was made for the amount by the agent for Geo. Marwood, to whom they belonged, who was not a clergyman, but a lay impropriator. The Churchwardens also made a demand for church rates. As we considered these to be ecclesiastical demands against which Friends had borne their testimony from the time of George Fox, we refused to pay them. It was the plan of some Friends to have corn in their granary about the time the tithes were due. The doors being left open, the officer and his men filled their sacks and sold it at the mill. With the cash received for the grain they paid the tithe agent the amount due to G. M., the churchwardens the amount due for church rates, and the officers the expenses incurred by the seizure . . . We could not adopt this evasive method, and as we had no corn in the granary they seized as many head of fat stock as they considered would sell for the amount claimed. The bellman cried the sale to take place in front of the 'Buck' Inn. The two butchers attended . .

One aspect of Quaker influence in the village was temperance. Ayton never became a 'dry' village like New Marske, where the owner of the ironstone mine, Sir Joseph Whitwell Pease, allowed no pubs to be built at all, but there was nevertheless a strong temperance movement, although, of course, Quakers were not the only ones involved. The Band of Hope was popular and active and it regularly organised large tea parties at the British School, attended by several hundred people. Ayton, wrote George Dixon, *was called the teetotal village*. One institution formed with the intention of 'improving' workingmen and weaning them from drink was the Working Men's Institute, founded in 1875. It started in Cleveland Street, just round the corner from the present premises. Its president was the Quaker, Jonathan Backhouse Hodgkin, of Cleveland Lodge, and its main feature was a reading room, open daily, with 700 volumes.

Hodgkin also owned the 'Village Hall' on the High Green, sometimes known as the tin tabernacle. This was where

village theatricals or concerts could be held, but a strict eye was kept on their propriety. The fairly innocent entertainment given by the Flood-Porters in 1896 (see next page), just managed to scrape through this censorship. When it was announced that skirt dances were to be part of the programme, Hodgkin sent his agent to visit Madame Flood-Porter and investigate. The agent reported, *It would appear from her account that there is no exposure of the limbs, as, if one side of the skirt is held up at an angle of 90 degrees it is so fully pleated that it does not even expose the underskirt at all.* Hodgkin was not entirely convinced and wrote back, *It is very difficult at all times to draw the line between what may prove to be innocent and allowable and what may prove to be objectionable - more especially when we never attend anything of the kind and have no personal knowledge of such entertainment.* However, the Flood-Porters were allowed to proceed with their concert.


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Sex, as we know, was a difficult issue for most Victorians, but possibly Quakers worried themselves about it more than most. William Henry Thistlethwaite wrote in his diary towards the end of 1884, when he was nearly 22: *The question I am continually asking myself is - is it right to indulge to too great an extent in the society of the fair sex? Especially anyone in particular, though if there is mutual love, surely at this age it cannot be frivolous?* William Henry Thistlethwaite, whose grand-daughter, Mrs Doreen Evered, recently had 'highlights' from his diaries serialised in the Middlesbrough Evening Gazette, is an example of another problem faced especially by Quaker tradesmen, who

sometimes had difficulty in finding their precise place in the class system of a rural community. William Henry received a classical education at Ackworth, the Quaker boarding school, yet he was expected to - and did - succeed his father, Jeremiah, in the management of their grocery shop (see page 10). Later, he married the daughter of the Friends' School headmaster, only to discover that his wife flatly refused to help in the shop. The problem was, with families like the Thistlethwaites, that their manners and general culture were above that of other shopkeepers, but the local professional classes - their cultural equals - often refused to socialise with them.

The high tide of Quaker influence in the village came perhaps at the end of the nineteenth century, when a glance at the Quaker register of births shows that a high proportion of the local gentry were Quakers. For instance:

31.8.1885 A.E. Kitching of Ayton Firs and his wife Annie Backhouse had Harold Edward

18.12.1900 Henry Kitching of the Grange and his wife Beatrice Eliza had Noel

5.2.1904 Edwin Backhouse Richardson of Langbaourgh Hall and his wife Emilie Helena had Violet Winifred

2.5.1904 J. P Fry of Cleveland Lodge and his wife Margaret Theodora had Francis Wilfrid

Catholics

Clearly, there was a Catholic church in Ayton before the Reformation, but during the penal years, when fines and persecution were the order of the day, there were few Catholics in the village, as compared, for instance, with the number in Stokesley. In the census taken in 1676, out of 361 persons in Ayton over the age of 16, only 2 were classed as *popish recusants*, whereas Stokesley had 105. During most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Stokesley had a Catholic Lord of the Manor whereas Ayton had the Coulsons and Skottowes, who were Protestant dissenters, or sympathetic to dissent, and therefore likely to be anti-Catholic. When, in 1746, following the failure of the '45 Jacobite rebellion, there were anti-Catholic riots in Stokesley during which the mass house was destroyed by a gang of youths, we are told that Thomas Skottowe of Ayton Hall, the local magistrate, *laughingly* dismissed charges against the rioters and recommended the Catholics to put up with the damage.

The penal laws against Catholics were relaxed towards the end of the eighteenth century, and Catholic emancipation came finally in 1829. It is likely that the number of Catholics in Ayton was increased by Irish immigrants coming to work either on the railway or in the mines, but there are few records. Not until 1860 was a Catholic mission established at Stokesley, and a converted granary loft in the yard of the Angel Inn used as a chapel. In 1873 St. Joseph's church was opened, and the priest in charge of the Deanery which included Stokesley defended the choice of site as being convenient for Ayton people, as it stood at their end of Stokesley and would be an attractive walk for them on Sundays.

The final chapter in the story of Catholics in Ayton comes in 1966 when a Sunday mass was instituted at the Ambulance room in Linden Drive. This was followed, in 1970, by a new, purpose-built church opposite Race Terrace, which in October, 1971, became the first church in the world to be dedicated to the recently canonised Yorkshire saint, Margaret Clitherow, who was martyred for her faith at York in Elizabeth's reign.

Footnotes (see Great Ayton – A History of the Village by Dan O'Sullivan)

1 Kettlewell p. 52: Rev. Bryan Dale, *Yorkshire Puritanism and Early Non-Conformity*, 1910, p.53

2 Kettlewell, p. 52

3 NYCRO QSB. Jan. 1708

4 Kettlewell, pp. 53-4

5 Rev. J.G. Miall, *Congregationalism in Yorkshire*, 1868, p. 226

6 PRO RG 4/3147

7 Stokesley Methodist Circuit, NYCRO R/M/STY 1/1

8 Tom Burns. *A North York Moors Selection*, p. 133, quoting *The Journal of William Clowes*; Primitive Methodist records for the Brompton Circuit (which included Ayton) are at the NYRCO R/M/NO 1/2/10

9 David S. Hall, 'Quakers in Cleveland', in CTLHS no. 6, p. 3

10 Kettlewell, p. 50

11 NYRCO R/Q/G (Guishorough Monthly Meeting records)

12 NYRCO R/Q/G

13 The others were William Wilson (3 male servants), Mrs Jackson and Mrs Skottowe (1 each); YAJ 14 (1898), p. 65

- 14 John William Rowntree, *Essays and Addresses*, 1906, p. 61
- 15 Rowntree, p. 63
- 16 List of members of Guisborough & Ayton Particular Meeting, 20.5.1793, NYCRO R/Q/G
- 17 A. G. Boyce, *Records of a Quaker Family: The Richardsons of Cleveland*, 1889, appendix A
- 18 Dixon pp. 93-4
- 19 Inrham CRO D/HO/ C 76
- 20 Evening Gazette (Middlesbrough), 6 articles during February, 1981
- 21 NYCRO R/Q/G
- 22 *The Compton Census of 1676*, British Academy, 1986
- 23 Graves, p. 227
- 24 David Allen, *The Centenary of St. Joseph's, Stokesley*, (pamphlet), 1973