

In the 1840s the Registrar General George Graham used the register of births, deaths and marriages to report on educational standards. Graham was able to use these data as a result of Lord Hardwick's Marriage Act of 1754 which required grooms and brides who could not sign their name to register their mark which traditionally was a cross or X. Graham's 1840 data showed that 33% of grooms and 49% of brides signed their names with a cross as a substitute for their signature. Perhaps unsurprisingly when he revisited this measurement 35 years later the situation had improved.

Several Educational Acts in the 19th C. assisted in the improvements in children's education.

The 1870 Act was a principal piece of social legislation for this period to result in education becoming a real priority. Other subsequent Acts to improve educational levels were:

1876 Act - ensured that, in principle, all children were to receive elementary education.

1880 Act – This Act improved attendance at school to age 10. At 10, subject to satisfactory attendance at classes, the child was issued with a leaving certificate. Poor attendance resulted in the child staying on at school.

1883 Act – this Act specified that a child could be employed if he/she had attended school a specified number of hours/weeks

1893 – this Act increased the school leaving age to 11. Subsequent Acts increased the school leaving age: 1899 to 12; 1918 to 14 and 1944 to 15.

Schooling developed in Great Ayton between 1700 and the 1800s. In 1704 the Postgate School was opened for 8 poor boys and by 1819 had a pupil total of 30 children. During this period the school taught a young James Cook living near Aireyholme Farm, later to become famous as Captain James Cook. This school closed in 1851.

In the 1840s to 1850s three schools opened in Great Ayton:

- i) The North of England Agricultural School (although not intended for village children)
- ii) The British School
- iii) The Marwood School

The records for marriages in Great Ayton as recorded in the All Saints Church records have enable us to determine a measure of education standards similar to those of the Register General George Graham described earlier in this article. It is doubtful whether Lord Hardwick would ever imagined that his Act would be used to measure educational standards.

The Great Ayton data on grooms and brides was compiled on marriage records of the period 1818 and 1902, averaging 3-year periods every 10 years. These data are:

<u>Year period</u>	<u>Number of weddings</u>	<u>Number of grooms/brides marking with X</u>	
		<u>Grooms (%)</u>	<u>Brides (%)</u>
1818-1820	22	6 (27%)	14 (64%)
1828-1830	25	3 (12%)	8 (32%)
1838-1840	18	3 (17%)	8 (33%)
1840 National data, average % marking with x		33%	49%
1848-1850	25	4 (16%)	5 (20%)
1858-1860	25	3 (12%)	3 (12%)
1868-1870	26	2 (8%)	1 (4%)
1878-1880	31	2 (6.5)	5 (16%)
1888-1890	29	0	1 (3.7%)
1900-1902	39	0	0

In 1840 the data suggests that Ayton children were receiving a better education than the average British child (at least as measured by their ability to write their name).

In general terms the grooms seemed to outscore the brides until around 1840 when the scores become more comparable.