

Great Ayton Community Archaeology Project

White House, a brief history

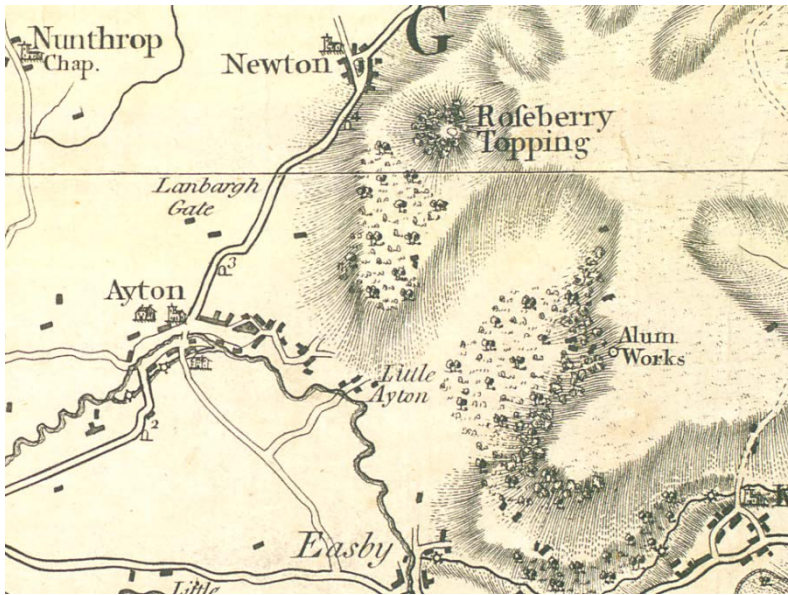


White House and White House Farm are situated at the crossroads of Dikes Lane and Aireyholme Lane on the outskirts of Great Ayton, beyond the railway station. The two houses are familiar landmarks to walkers, cyclists and horse riders. This presentation looks at the history of White House and some of the families who have lived there.



This brief history explains how White House came to be built, and describes some of the families who have lived in them.

It has been researched and produced by Ian Pearce, who has lived at White House Farm since 1982.



In 1765, John Liddell purchased land at Ayton Banks and opened an alum works there in 1766. Alum was widely used, mainly in dyeing and tanning. The Jefferys map of 1771 (left) clearly shows the site of the Ayton Banks alum works.

Access to the alum works would be along what is now Station Road and Dikes Lane, past Gribdale Terrace. In the 18th century this track was known as Low Dikes and High Dikes. It is almost certain that the original White House was built for the manager of the alum works, where he could keep an eye on the many workmen and quantities of coal which would pass by on their way up the hill.



In 1771, John Liddell was bankrupt and the following year the alum works passed into the hands of Sir George Colebrooke. Colebrooke himself was bankrupt in 1776, and we know from the papers associated with this bankruptcy that the alum works was being managed by John Ridley.

John Ridley came from Robin Hoods Bay and, in later life, returned to live there at "The Plantation"

After Colebrook's bankruptcy, John Ridley probably acquired both the alum works and the house at Low Dikes, as the "Ayton Alum Work Estate". He lived, and probably later rented out, White House.

In 1815, John Ridley sold White House, then known as Ayton Cottage, to Thomas Bulmer, a tinman and brazier from Guisborough.



In 1851, Rebecca Smith, a widow aged 82 and her unmarried daughters Hannah and Sarah Selfe, are recorded as living at Ayton Cottage with a servant. The Smiths were Quakers, and were presumably renting the house from Thomas Bulmer. Two years later, Hannah and Selfe Smith purchased Ayton Cottage.

The house was sold to John Pease in 1865. John Pease had inherited Cleveland Lodge after the death of Thomas Richardson in 1843, and so the house became part of the Cleveland Lodge estate. John Pease died in 1868 and the Cleveland Lodge estate was inherited by his daughter Mary Anna Pease, who married Jonathan Backhouse Hodgkin in 1873. White House was then rented out to Quaker families.

At the time of the 1871 census, William and Ann Jones were living at White House. William Jones set up the first chemical works, a Leblanc alkali plant, in Middlesbrough. He had almost certainly been brought to Teesside by the Middlesbrough Owners, with the intention of opening an artificial fertiliser factory. With increasing profits from his business, William Jones built Undercliffe Hall in 1874 at a cost of £3,675 and vacated White House.

George Dixon, the youngest son of the first superintendent of the Quaker Ayton School and land agent for the Cleveland Lodge estate, decided White House suited his status as a gentleman of the village. He carried out a thorough survey, and only moved in the following year after extensive repairs had been done. Even then he complained about the narrow gauge railway track which had been laid close to house to carry whinstone from Gribdale. George, very much the country gentleman, is shown here taking tea in the garden.





White House soon after the Dixons moved in, with a newly-erected pergola above the front fence. A good many years earlier, the house had been considerably extended from the original Ayton Cottage.

George and Martha spent many hours in the garden (right), George being a particularly keen gardener.





Some of George and Martha's children outside White House.

The living room at White House, during George Dixon's time.





George and some of the family setting off for Helmsley (taken at the cross-roads of Dikes Lane and Aireyholme Lane, with Undercliffe Hall, built by William Jones, in the background).

In 1921 White House was sold to Charlotte Myfanwy Hood, a widow, for £1535. In the 1930s, Harold and Clara Hood built Cherry Hill in part of the garden.

Harold Hood was a keen photographer and had a publishing business in Middlesbrough. He specialised in illustrated books of Middlesbrough and the surrounding countryside; two examples of his pictures are shown below, Middlesbrough Town Hall in the snow and the Cook Cottage at Great Ayton.



In the 1950s the Bolland family lived at White House. Margery Cumbor, from School Farm, was employed as a nanny for the children, Susannah and Christina. She wore a uniform and had her own kitchen and nursery. There was also a gardener named Mr Briggs. The garden opposite had already been reduced in size by the building of Cherry Hill, but was still large. Later Cherry Orchard and Meadow Lodge were build here and the garden was no more.



Photographs of Mr and Mrs Bolland with their children at White House.

The Bollands had built White House Cottage in part of their garden.

When the Bollands left, White House became the home of Admiral Jack Unwin, his wife and their two sons.

The recently-built White House Cottage was also owned by Jack Unwin, and was rented out to Larry and Avril Cocking, who later emigrated to America.