Introduction

William Henry Thistlethwaite (1864-1944) was the son of Jeremiah and Rachel Thistlethwaite. Jeremiah came to Ayton in 1857 to set up a grocery business in Eagle House at the bottom of Station Road. William Henry succeeded his father in managing the grocery business, and also became a noted amateur photographer. The *Middlesbrough Evening Gazette* put together a series of seven supplements about William Henry's life, with the assistance of Mrs Dorothy Evered, his grand-daughter. She also involved William Henry's daughter, Helen Thistlethwaite, and drew extensively from William Henry's diaries. The supplement was written by Julie Richardson and published in 1984. This transcript has reduced the number of paragraphs in the originals, but the text is the same. The original article used an incorrect spelling of Frederick Treves (Treeves) and this has been corrected. The many photographs are not included here.

Part One Camera under his arm - a spring in his step

The man who looked like Lord Kitchener walked down the streets of Great Ayton with a camera under his arm and a spring in his step. It was a summer afternoon, the birds were singing and William Henry Thistlethwaite had got a bit of free time. So he'd taken off his clean, white apron, smoothed his dark brown hair and set off to take photographs of the village and the people he loved. He took pictures of people at rest and of people at play, of their homes and their celebrations. And all this at a time when he was building up a 50-year record of a village and its dwellers from the 1880s through the turn of the century. Now his granddaughter, Mrs Doreen Evered, wants to preserve the record forever in a book.

It was in 1884 at the age of 20 that William Henry Thistlethwaite, trainee grocer at a Middlesbrough store and copious reader of the works of celebrated authors such as Sir Walter Scott, Dickens and Thackeray, decided he was going to buy one of those new-fangled machines known as cameras. It had a black cloth at the back you put your head under, and glass plates to record the image. It was all rather fascinating to young William Henry. And he was delighted as he brought it home and began experimenting at dawn before he started work.

"He had a little hut in the garden, specially to do his developing and printing in at first," said Mrs Evered. "He called it his 'studio' and blocked the light out of it."

By the end of 1884, William Henry was working in his father Jeremiah's Great Ayton grocery and drapery store and taking pretty good pictures. A few years later, he had taken over that business and his aunt's bakery business, starting his own bakery, becoming manager of his father's Gribdale gate whinstone mine, was helping on his father's farm in the middle of Great Ayton - breaking horses among other pursuits - and had married pretty Miss Alice Elizabeth Dixon. And he was still taking pretty good pictures.

"He was working terribly hard, but he didn't seem to think it was hard," said Mrs Evered, a retired teacher, who not only has 500 of her grandfather's original glass plates but four of his diaries too. "He seemed to be able to get out from the shops in the afternoon. He would go out and take pictures of people, their homes, his family and friends. He was so enthusiastic."

He was also an ardent Quaker in a village that was once known as 'the Quaker village' and housed no fewer than 40 Thistlethwaites and their relatives. After schooling at the village Marwood School, then at Ackworth and Halifax in the West Riding, William Henry continued to go to Quaker meetings twice on Sunday and to evangelical meetings on the village green. His parents were both strict and religious and William Henry grew up rather a sombre young man with a strong moral sense. On his 21st birthday, he wrote in Greek in his diary: "The night is coming."

"He thought he was so old at 21 that he was preparing for his death. He is a bit sombre in these diaries," said Mrs Evered. She was born at Harborgill in Station Road, Great Ayton, her grandfather's second and final home and now the

home of her aunt, 90-year-old Miss Helen Thistlethwaite. "They were very religious people. At the end of the diaries, William Henry does a moral self-assessment. He's pretty rigorous about it. One thing I can remember is that he says, 'Can it be wrong to spend so much time in the company of the fair sex?'"

But grandfather didn't seem so stern to the young Doreen when she and her little sister Lucy went to visit him. "He was very kind," she remembered. "And he had thick hair, white when I knew him. He was a very upright figure and always dressed well to go out. He wore a brown trilby, suit and waistcoat with a gold watch and chain. They say he used to look like Kitchener."

The girls' grandfather used to read aloud from books such as *The Secret Garden* as they sat sewing of an evening. In the daytime he would take them to his shops, where they watched the bread baking and he watched as they stole buttered brazils from the sweet jars.

"I think he knew, for when we got too greedy he put a stop to it," said Mrs Evered, with a smile. William Henry also put a stop to his own photography as son as the box camera came into vogue. He was, it seems, an individualist. And the thought of everyone else snapping his scenes with their modern equipment was too much.

So he put away his camera and settled back into obscurity until his death in 1944. Mrs Evered, who is 65 and now lives near Bridgewater in Somerset, wants to end all that. Apart from planning a book on Ayton around the photographs, she also wants to write a book on the diaries of the Quakerman.

"I think people should be interested in both these things," she said. "My grandfather was a very interesting man." William Henry's four diaries tell of a young man in the changing years of life from 17 to 22. In them, he starts off as a student and sportsman and finishes a married man running the family store. He confides to his diaries his opinions, doings and the events of the world as he saw them. And he tells of the two passions of his long life - his wife and the art of photography.

William Henry and his wife are both long gone. But William Henry's diaries and the pictures that he took are keeping both their memories alive.

Part Two What a picture - but only after so much trouble

The two girls ran chattering into the garden, followed by their mother. It was a great occasion and all three were wearing their best hats. They arranged themselves on the chairs set for them on the lawn and smiled prettily towards the strange object in front of them. The three sisters could see the trousered legs of their only brother emerging from a black velvet sheet at the back of the contraption. Above, they could make out only the shape of his head beneath the cloth. Rosie and Lucy found the whole thing highly exciting and even amusing, despite the cold and the threat of rain. But they dare not move after they had begun their pose. William Henry didn't like it. And besides, the picture came out blurred.

Suddenly a hand appeared from beneath the black sheet. The three ladies held their breaths. Then all at once it was over and William Henry Thistlethwaite emerged from the sheet, his straight dark hair slightly rumpled and a smile on his handsome teenage face.

The same evening, one windy Thursday in March, William Henry went down to the shed at the bottom of the garden and developed the photographs he'd taken. Next morning he rose just after five and went sleepy-eyed back to the shed he'd turned into his darkroom. After some trouble with the solutions, he managed to tone half a dozen general prints by 8 a.m. and print those of his mother and sisters. Next day, up at 6 a.m. to tone those prints, William Henry met with a problem. A keen frost had frozen all the water and solutions in the little garden shed. It was some time before he'd got everything thawed out. But when the prints were completed, William Henry looked thoughtfully at them - and decided he wasn't satisfied. He hadn't been satisfied with any of the results of his new camera. He got sorry and vexed with himself over his failures. But he didn't give up. He wasn't a man to give up without a try - and photography was a completely new medium that William Henry Thistlethwaite meant to master, no matter how long it took.

William Henry came from hardworking and tenacious Quaker stock, respectable and generally good at business, but not specifically concerned with amassing worldly goods. He had grown up by a close family atmosphere in the village of Great Ayton. He went to the local Marwood school, honoured his father Jeremiah and mother Rachel and was a son among four daughters. He moved away to the Quaker Ackworth School in the south of the county, but soon returned to the bosom of his family.

The family didn't come from Ayton, but from the Yorkshire Dales. William Henry's father had only decided to settle in the village in 1857. He had been born in Dentdale, brought up by a Quaker but technically disowned because his father had married out of the movement. When Jeremiah himself wanted to marry his Quaker bride, he too defied the rules and took her to a register office. It was some years before he was allowed to become a full Quaker, just before he moved to Ayton to open the grocery and drapery business at Eagle House.

Jeremiah was an excellent tradesman, times were good and business flourished. He even bought Buck Bank Farm and began a lifelong interest in breeding carthorses and cattle. So young William Henry grew up amidst the two rather opposing poles of reasonable wealth and strict Quakerism. He reached manhood in an atmosphere full of parents, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins - and few others. Almost all were Quakers. Those within the family were addressed as 'thee' and 'thou' and a few of the older generation would still wear the traditional Quaker dress of broad-brimmed hat and collarless coat. William Henry didn't meet too many other people, mainly because Quakers in general were set apart. They didn't quite fit into the class system.

The problem was that their education, manners and general culture were higher than those of their non-Quaker social counterparts. This meant that non-Quakers of the professional class refused to mix with their intellectual equals - the Quakers of the trading class. And they in turn felt nothing in common with tradesmen non-Quakers. By the time William Henry was 17, the year was 1881. Queen Victoria had ruled England with her strict moral values for nearly half a century. The Boer war was raging in South Africa. The population of Britain travelled gently and lazily about by slow train, horse and trap, or bicycle. And William Henry was at home with his parents and sisters and very much a young man of leisure.

Three years later, he was to take up the two abiding passions of his life - photography and his wife to be, Miss Alice Elizabeth Dixon. But now he was simply an intelligent and educated young man, who knew Latin, Greek and French and read classic novels and biographies with insatiable appetite. He also began a diary in which he recorded the daily run of his life and the events of the time. As a preface, he wrote: "This diary I commence at the age of 17, hoping to continue it as long as possible, that I may have pleasure reading it over in after years."

His thoughts were of home and world politics, literature, sport … and the weather. That first diary speaks of little else, but for family life and work in the family store. Things mattered a great deal to the young man. On February 3rd he wrote: "There are most disgraceful proceedings going on in Parliament just now through obstruction by the Home Rulers, headed by Parnell. Parliament was sitting 42 hours from Monday at 4 to Wednesday at 10 and little or nothing done." He continues by saying he has begun giving French lessons to Rosie, who is "very ignorant" about it. And that he's expecting cousin Mary to tea, "on which account we are expecting green snow."

By February 16th he was back to politics - and war: "By the paper this morning, there is a sign of peace in the Transvaal and among the Boers. It is to be hoped that there will be as satisfactory a result as anticipated. Mr Parnell is yet absent from his Parliamentary duties as he has been for a week or more. There were reports that he was accessory to a plot with regards to blowing up of Windsor or something of the sort, so his letters have been stopped and read by the Government, though nothing has been found out, I think."

With the vagaries of youth, William Henry didn't finish off the tale of Mr Parnell and the Windsor affair. Instead, he wrote about Mr Gladstone, then Prime Minister, who on February 25th "had a serious accident by falling on his doorstep after getting out of his brougham and cutting his head." Mr Gladstone was expected to be well enough to "attend House on Monday," which he no doubt did. Three days later, he records that the English were defeated in the Transvaal, their general killed. And on March 14th a Monday, the Emperor of Russia was "assassinated by a bomb thrown between his legs" on what William Henry calls "the finest day of the year". I trust that he was referring to the weather, rather than the emperor's demise.

Another death was recorded on April 20th. "This morning, The Echo had the news which we have been expecting for the last week and which it was prophesied would take place by Monday, viz d'Israeli's death, which occurred at 4:30 yesterday morning in Curzon Street, at the age of 76. He passed away quietly through sheer exhaustion from his sufferings."

Yet another momentous occasion was recorded on July 4th "President Garfield of the United States of America has been shot on Saturday. He is in a very critical state, a bullet having entered his arm … and another between his ribs." By July 5th "President Garfield is in a very precarious state, private telegrams give no hope, though those sent to the government are rather more vague … the Brighton murderer is still at large, though the police have their eyes open; it is suspected that he has committed suicide." It was not until the end of September that William Henry wrote that physicians had "given up all hope" for the President, who then died. And on November 29th a man called Lefroy proved he hadn't committed suicide and was hanged for the Brighton murders. "Lefroy swung yesterday punctually at 9 a.m. with a struggle. He was very dejected and low spirited on his last day …" The day before he had written "I have no belief at all that he committed the murder of Roper and most people are of the same opinion."

William Henry sought out the opinions of others: on Life with a capital 'L' and politics with a small 'p'. He read national and local newspapers from cover to cover, commenting on their contents. It wasn't unusual for him also to read three thick books in a week - as well as playing a great many games of billiards, skating on the frozen Ayton waters in winter and playing tennis and cricket in summer. Though not a lazy young man, William Henry lacked direction and challenge. By 1884, he had found both. Photography, a new art. An opportunity to tread new ground. A new world opened up - yet not fully explored. William Henry decided to be one of the men to do it.

Part Three A small sacrifice

It was pitch black and raining hard as the young trainee grocer donned his coat and left the store for the night. He had foregone his half-hour tea break to be leaving so early. It was only just after six, but tea as a small sacrifice for William Henry to make. He was on his way to see a camera. A camera he was thinking of purchasing for a very reasonable sum. To make himself presentable, the young grocer called in at his lodgings in the town for a wash. And the cold January air must have stung his handsome face as he set out again for Harry Clarke's home. Mrs Clarke had tea ready by the time her husband's guest appeared.

Only when it was decently over could William Henry and his host excuse themselves and disappear into Harry Clarke's den to see the treasured camera. William Henry had been thinking seriously of making the purchase since the New Year. He had seen Harry Clarke's model the week before and it had pleased him well. But there had been no time for discussion then because Harry had a prior engagement at nine. William Henry closely examined the camera and talked with the other man about the chemical side of the photographic business. For months now, he had been reading books and ordering catalogues on the subject, studying all the theory he could lay his hands on. Now the year was 1884 and it was providing him with his great opportunity. Not only was he going to buy his own camera and put all the new-found theory to the test, but he was leaving Amos Hinton's in Middlesbrough to go home and work with his father, Jeremiah, in the family grocer business at Great Ayton. His father had promised him a photographic darkroom, to be built at the bottom of the garden.

At 20 years of age, life was definitely taking a turn for the better for William Henry. On his first day at home, he went with his father to the joiner's shop to see about the 'wooden house' that would become his darkroom. Before the week was out, he had his new camera - price £5.2s.6d including 'appurtenances' - and was making his first attempts at focussing - and failing. But after having words with a photographic friend called 'Crisp', that at least started to improve. On March 7th, 1884, a fine and mild day, he wrote in the third of his diaries he kept of his daily life: "Arranging camera and at three walked with it to Rye Hill, intending to have half an hour with Crisp, but it was five before I got back. We took two or three pictures of is house and I got a fair one of Undercliffe - first attempt at focussing which I managed."

William Henry didn't manage to surmount every problem so easily, but he took photograph after photograph, first of relatives and friends, then of houses in the village and landscapes outside. He continued to do so until he got everything right - and the novelty of having taken their pictures taken had rather worn off for the relatives and friends. But it wasn't just the taking of the picture itself that was difficult. That was probably the easy part for William Henry, who had a natural eye for a well-placed group and a picturesque scene. It was the chemical side of the business. Pictures weren't processed in minutes. They took literally days. And since no one had yet invented a foolproof method of telescoping the operation - or in fact any foolproof methods at all - each picture was an experiment. Those early snaps are remaining proof that men had determination and will power in the face of failure. Pictures that had taken days to process in freezing darkrooms among chemicals that stripped the skin off unprotected fingers would often end up useless and have to be redone. William Henry's were no exception. But he kept on at it, despite the fact that as an only son he was having to put enormous amounts of energy into the family business.

On Wednesday, March 12th, the joiner set up the longed-for darkroom. For the next three days, William Henry rose at dawn to set about filling up the chinks that let in the daylight and turning it into what he called his 'studio'. On Friday, March 14th he wrote: "Rosie was anxious to see some of my productions so I arranged the camera and had Ma, Lucy and Rosie in the garden for one plate, allowing it five seconds and for the next, Father, Lucy and Rosie, giving four seconds' exposure … mixing necessary chemicals 'til 10:45 (p.m.)." The next day Rose at 5:40 and made considerable improvements in studio by 7:30, when I developed the two plates I took yesterday. But too much exposure and too strong a solution spoiled them. Chrisp here in the afternoon and we did a little work but with poor results, but after I have altered proportions expect improvement."

Sunday was a day of rest, two visits to the Quaker meeting house with the rest of the family and a trip to father's farm to see the lambs. But on Monday he was back in his studio at 5:30 a.m. preparing his plates. Then "photographing Allie (Miss Alice Elizabeth Dixon) and Ted in the afternoon, but spoiled them in developing … do better next time … Sorry and vexed I have spoiled the plates." On Wednesday, March 19th he wrote: "At 3:30 I adjourned to terrace and took two

groups of Ralph Dixon's (his future father-in-law's) family, which I developed in the evening. More satisfactory - rather fogged I fear."

During the months that followed, William Henry was battling with other problems than his photography. He was the sort of man who took most things seriously - including himself and the family business. When he arrived to hep officially with the family store, he had set out to improve things dramatically. He felt that other shops in Ayton had kept up with the times, while their own had not. So he went into it "determined that I would give my heart and soul to the work and see if a change cannot be early effected." On the first day, March 4th he wrote: "Wretched day, no customers astir .. the weather has certainly but (been) unfavourable today, yet £4 would cover our receipts which is very far from what it should be. Fact is that Alex Holmes and other pushing men have been continually moving on whilst we still have been making no effort … but time, I hope, will work wonders."

One of William Henry's ideas to promote business was to advertise a cut-price product on handbills, hoping to whip up trade for other products. Tuesday, April 29th: "Wretchedly disappointing - nothing to do - all the effect our bills seem to have had is they come for 1½lb of treacle and expect to get everything else at greatly reduced prices." Despite this setback, the very next day William Henry was "considering" another handbill. Sales fluctuated all year. The drapery and grocery shop was destined never to regain the flourishing trade it once had, not through any fault of William Henry's but simply because of excess competition from elsewhere.

But that didn't stop the young man railing against the situation many times. One cold October day he wrote that it had been the quietest Saturday they'd had in the shop since he came home. "I suppose partly on account of the wretched weather - but people cannot give up eating." He also railed against himself. "I am much annoyed at my want of stability or perseverance - but not that I do not attend to my business, but I cannot make up my mind to travel (as a salesman) myself and in the present hands it is useless. My photography, which is my hobby, is not having the results I anticipated and which would be possible if I persisted. I must make an effort to overcome these difficulties and will do so."

On Thursday, June 12th he wrote that he was "perfectly disgusted" with the results from a photograph taken at Knaresborough. Strong words. But although it may not appeared so to him, his skill at photography was slowly but surely improving. He still spoilt many a plate and harangued himself for it. But good ones began to appear. Pictures of the family and their shop assistant, Mr Atkinson, had all turned out well. "Got some very decent prints from the last photographs," he wrote on July 26th a Saturday. And at the beginning of August he persevered with pictures of the shop and of his sister Lucy until all came out splendidly.

That same week - the week of Ayton Show - William Henry Thistlethwaite had a breakthrough. He sold a dozen of his pictures to a man from Stokesley. He didn't know it then, but the sale was only the first of many. William Henry Thistlethwaite had finally become a photographer. There was only one thing that could sway him from that course now. And that was the love of pretty, modern Miss Alice Elizabeth Dixon.

Part Four Photography has to take a back seat - to love

William Henry Thistlethwaite was in love. He had thought himself in love before, and to the same girl, but the feeling had died down amidst the welter of new experiments with his other passion - photography. This time, however, it was different. William Henry felt that his love had simply lain dormant for months. Now, it had reawakened with amazing force. William Henry realised that this young girl, Allie, had a most unaccountable influence over him. Usually, he was of a somewhat puritanical nature. Like most of his large and devout Quaker family of Great Ayton, he went religiously to meetings, didn't smoke, drink, dance, play cards or even go to the theatre.

Secret notes about his lady, written in shorthand, began to appear in the diary. Notes about his photography became fewer. It was hardly surprising that the two should fall in love. Alice Elizabeth Dixon was a pretty, finely-built young woman with long dark hair, beautiful eyes and the most exquisite taste in fine hats. She was also very modern. At only 19, she had moved to the smokey but fashionable London as governess to the son of Mrs Rachel Tuckett, a wealthy Quaker of Highgate. There, the village girl met such famed men of mid-Victorian England as the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Robert Fowler, railway millionaire Sir Joseph Pease and historian Thomas Hodgkin.

Never robust, she grew ill and was forced to leave London. But she took home to Chestnut House, Great Ayton, a fashionable style and gentility that immediately attracted young William Henry - who always had an eye for the ladies - and which she never lost. He too was handsome. Dark-skinned, dark-haired and of medium height and build, he was also generous, kind and educated. He was also a man who believed instinctively that he could do batter than simply remain a grocer, Miss Dixon obviously agreed with him. A bonus to their relationship was that both families were Quakers. The religion's strict rules were gradually softening, but its members still found it far from easy to marry outsiders and risked being cast out if they did. But the families, though strict, weren't dull and never had been. He was a great reader and a fine sportsman - as well as being a competitive one who exulted in private when he won his bouts.

And up to this fine autumn day in 1884, the love of his life had been the new fangled science known as photography, a medium in which he was making slow but effective strides. Miss Alice Dixon, as pretty and petite a neighbour as any man could wish for, completely turned his head. On September 20th, he wrote in his diary: "My dormant love for Allie has awakened with renewed force." She too was a Quaker, so she didn't lead her young man to break the religion's strict taboos. (Quakers were, after all, so called because a Quakerman called George Fox had bade one Justice Bennet of Derby "quake and tremble at the word of God"). But in those early days of romance, young William Henry spent every moment he could with his beloved. He went so far as to skip religious meetings just to be alone with her. Her every move took on the significance of love. Even her slight indispositions - followed by her complete obliteration of her beloved on the tennis court - were recorded in the ardent suitor's diary. On Friday, November 28th, he wrote: "At 7:15 I went up to sit with Allie whilst the rest were at missionary meeting. I stayed until nine - a most enjoyable time." But the photographer in William Henry was being slowly obliterated by the lover.

Allie's own grandfather, George Dixon - first headmaster of Ayton Friends' School - was an adventurer who thrived on danger. His father Ralph had fought under Wellington against napoleon, receiving one of his wounds from the French at Talavera in Spain in 1809. Not to be outdone, his dominant son George travelled by ship to America at the finish of the American Civil War that put an end to slavery. The Quakers of England had decided that the first thing a free slave should have was education. They decided that George Dixon was one of the men who should see it was done. The North may have won the civil war, but some of the Southerners weren't feeling too civil about it. These were the men of the Ku Klux Klan, set up in 1864 to intimidate, flog, mutilate, or murder the very Negro men, women and children that George Dixon was there to educate. In Tennessee alone, a murder a day was being committed. Between November 1864 and March 1865, the number of cases of personal violence had reached 400. And anyone attempting to evade the murderers or bring them to justice was sure of only one thing - he too would be found and mutilated or killed.

In the face of all this, George Dixon helped educate hundreds of freed Negro slaves, particularly in the two states of North Carolina and Virginia. But the threat of the Ku Klux Klan loomed large. One night, a messenger rode up out of the dark to the place where George Dixon lived. There was trouble at a school. A young white girl working for the slaves feared for her life at the hands of the Klan. George Dixon got on his horse and rode away to her rescue. He found the girl, whisked her up on to the front of his horse and galloped them both away to safety under the noses of the

murderous Klan. The young lady he rescued was a New Englander named Eunice Congdon, the sister of a general. He not only rescued her - he married her and took her home to Ayton. This was the grandfather of the woman William Henry was desperate to marry.

He declared his love on bended knee one snowy November evening at Allie's home. He never recorded what she said. But it must have been favourable. He didn't mention photography again for a long time to come. But William Henry didn't love or live lightly. He went in for a great deal of critical self-examination, never coming out of it unscathed. Christmas Eve of that year was his 21st birthday. On it he wrote: "This day I have reached the age of 21. What a serious thought when I consider the very many faults and sins I am guilty of. It is really high time I made an improvement. I trust I may."

At the end of 1884, he added a footnote to the year's events that is almost a prayer.

"How very little we have improved since the last year at this time! How very much room there is for further improvement! May I, as the responsibility upon me increases daily, endeavour to merit success in all undertakings by steady persevering labour. 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 too frivolous? But what can there be holier than the love of a true woman and if really sincere and mutual, ought it not to be an incentive to harder work and greater usefulness?"

The outcome of those sentiments would be seen in the years ahead.

Part Five Married at last, and the start of a life of bliss

William Henry worked quietly away all day, packing the few orders to be sent out before the New Year's festivities. But he could hardly contain his excitement. At the stroke of four, he threw off his apron and hurried upstairs to change. At five, walked through the door the girl he had proposed to only days before - Allie Dixon. It wasn't to be a cosy party for two, though. Behind Allie came her sisters - Katie and Emmie, and her cousins Emmie, Hettie, May and Alf. But William Henry didn't object to the chaperones. It was his 21st birthday party. And although there was what he called "a great dearth of gents," they all set to, playing the fashionable parlour games of clumps, hissing and clapping, Isaac and Rebecca, shilling game and others.

Alas, the exertion was too much for Allie and at 8:30, even before supper was served, she had to be escorted home by the gallant William Henry. The young couple hadn't spoken to anyone of their affection. They were enjoying a secret love and they continued to do so for many months to come. Other friends had to take second place as the two remained absorbed in each other. They skated on the frozen "bath" and beck near the village, strolled through the woods, sat talking of their future in the chill of a summerhouse and William Henry went almost daily for tea at the Dixon home.

William Henry's diary for the year of 1885 is missing. But love must have run smooth, because on February 5th, 1886, the couple appeared together in public for the first time. On February 9th, a Tuesday, the 22 year-old William Henry wrote: "Spoke to father concerning my intention in the way of matrimony. Gave him to understand I had no intention of postponing matters for years to come."

What Jeremiah had to say to that will never be known, but the next day William Henry and Allie discussed pans for setting up home together after their marriage. Meanwhile, like many a young bride-to-be, Allie was getting quite upset about William Henry's friends. "… she appears to think that my friends look upon her as an intruder and do not behave as they should to one whom I trust will soon be my wife! Happy thought! However, matters have worked round wonderfully well so far and I trust may still be well."

Allie never did get on remarkably well with William Henry's friend, some of whom did resent her for her London ways rather tan her love for William Henry. He was, in fact, neglecting them. March 15th: "Letter from Fred Robinson or rather postcard, asking why I don't write. My Conscience smote me so I sent off a sheet I penned some seven or eight days ago with another added and promise of more shortly … I visited Allie as usual."

William Henry had been negotiating for some weeks to rent the lovely Ayton cottage known as Gribdale Cottage and later changed to Harborgill. On March 24th he got it - and the wedding date was set. With insight he wrote: "The wedding is fixed for July 29th, only some six weeks! I know I am getting the being whom I can love more than anyone and believe we are constituted to make each other happy. She, dear girl, will leave a good and happy home and friends. May she find one equally happy. It shall certainly be my every wish to endeavour to do all in my power for her health and welfare. It is a serious matter for a woman to leave her home for another so entirely different. It means the beginning almost of a fresh existence, as she cannot feel on the same footing with her relatives. So that one sees it to be serious as well as a most felicitous event. But, knowing each other so long, I am sure we shall be very happy and hope we shall never forget the one source above all others for comfort in time of trouble and to be thankful for our many blessings."

Setting introspection aside, what a flurry of work William Henry set about doing to the hose and garden which was to be his after the next few weeks. He noted first that the garden was in "lamentable condition" and spent long hours hoeing weeds, nailing up creepers, pruning berry trees, digging, trimming hedges and planting roses. Up at 6 a.m. one morning - to garden rather than process prints - he dug so fiercely that he had to stay in bed until seven next day because he was so stiff. The day after, he was back up at dawn, digging before breakfast. He still found time to work hard in the shop, write daily to Allie - who had gone away for a fortnight to Dewsbury - and send his "dear girl" boxes of flowers. It would be hard to picture a more devoted suitor.

June was a fine month, full of hot, clear days. The wedding day neared, much to William Henry's delight. He was so interested in the preparations that he recorded that the bridesmaids' dresses were to be of "pretty cream washing material," trimmed with old gold ribbon and with hates and gloves to match. "I spend as usual from 8 to 9:50 p.m. with the dear girl. The time is getting very near and makes me more and more anxious for it." Doubts assailed him, but only at his own limitations. On June 10th, he wrote: "I am often impressed by the responsibility of taking the dear girl away from her home and feel that I should be very careful to study her happiness and welfare in every particular."

William Henry wanted their new home to bring Allie just some of the happiness he thought she deserved. They spent £160 on new decorations and furnishings for it, and the young man spent a great deal of time arranging it to both their satisfactions. He was obsessed by homemaking for the woman he loved. "After dinner I made another mantel border for our drawing room," he wrote. "Also got some gold paint and gilded over the rusty window fasteners in most rooms. Allie came down after tea and helped me. I was with her from eight to ten - how I do love her!"

Six days before the wedding, they had a row for which William Henry reproached himself bitterly. "Very, very sorry I was cross with my darling Allie and hurt her feelings much," he wrote. "But we were good friends at night. The giving way to my temper with her whom I love so makes me wretched."

But on July 29th, 1886 William Henry had this to write: "A memorable day in my calendar. Today, I have obtained what for years has been by wish - a precious little wife. I dressed at school. Meeting at 10:30. Had just five minutes with Allie before. Meeting passed off very successfully. Allie spoke well. Breakfast at one. Allie and I left at 3:25 from Pinchinthorpe for Keswick amidst a shower of rice. We travelled mostly alone the whole way, arriving at 8:30. Very comfortable lodgings."

William Henry and his young wife enjoyed their honeymoon. Summer was almost at its height and the unspoilt Lake District was bursting with colour and birdsong. They took coach trips through Borrowdale to Buttermere, to Derwent Water and to Barrow Falls. "The scenery is simply grand," wrote William Henry on their first Saturday away. "In fact, we are enjoying our lives immensely." The next day: "Had a walk in the morning. At three attended conversion meeting in the tent. Walk by the lake in the evening … Fine, clear, pleasant. Both very happy."

They walked to beauty spots all over the countryside. One day, they visited the beautiful, square-towered Crosthwaite Church. The view from the church of nearby Skiddaw is said to be the most spectacular view from any bell tower in the country. On a clear day, even Scotland is in sight. Allie's "Will" as she called him, bought her a lemon that day. And at night she took up a pen to write in the diary: "We are so enjoying ourselves here. My dearest Will is so good to me." They went out to dinner, shopped - and even had their photographs taken in a local fine art gallery. "The man took us in two positions but we both think they will not do us justice!" wrote Allie. "Had two immense plates of oatmeal to supper."

Mr and Mrs William Henry Thistlethwaite returned to their new home - complete with its new maid - the following Saturday. They were very much in love - and remained so until the day they died. As the months went on, however, William Henry realised he had time to continue with something he had almost forgotten about. And that was his photography.

Part Six Congratulations!

William Henry Thistlethwaite was 32 and he was dying. The doctors had diagnosed inflammation of the bowels. It was incurable, they said, gravely shaking their heads. It would rapidly cause his death. William Henry didn't want to die, he had a loving wife, two small children, his own Great Ayton grocery business, and the photography he'd come to love once more.

A second opinion was sought, that of Dr John Dixon, a relation of William Henry's wife, Allie. John Dixon gave the stricken young man hope. He explained that in London was a man specialising in the surgical treatment of a newly discovered illness. The man was Mr Frederick Treves and the illness was appendicitis. John Dixon urged William Henry to go for treatment. Without delay, William Henry was prepared for the 180-mile journey to the surgeon’s knife.

He couldn't leave his bed, so he was carried on his mattress to a carriage waiting outside and the long journey began. Villagers had lain straw beneath the carriage wheels to cushion the sick man from the ruts in the road to the station. A special railway carriage had been set aside for him and was shunted from train to train during the long hours of travel, so he need not be moved again. William Henry must have arrived in London exhausted. Mr Treves operated immediately. Then he gave his shattering verdict: it was too late to save William Henry because peritonitis had already set in. Over the next few weeks, William Henry fought for his life in London.

But one of his last requests was that he wanted to die among his friends and relations. It was granted, since there was no more that the doctors could do. William Henry was taken home and a nurse was engaged to care for him. A short time later, Allie herself took over the nursing for what she thought were her husband's last days. A year later her nursing days were over, somehow, against all the odds, William Henry had pulled through. About five years later, Frederick Treves performed the same operation on Edward VII and was knighted. In 1895, it was miraculous.

Slowly, William Henry's life returned to normal. He had to remain in a wheelchair for weeks as he mustered his strength. But eventually he got back into the routine of running the grocery and drapery business at Eagle House, serving, ordering new stock, putting up orders for outlying Yorkshire farms and hamlets, and continuing to take photographs.

His two children, Bernard and Helen, were growing up fast. Soon Helen was able to help her father with his photographic developing and printing. William Henry had gone back to photography with a vengeance soon after his marriage to Allie in 1886. Picturesque Great Ayton, with its High Green and Low Green, Captain Cook’s Monument and nearby Roseberry Topping, was still a delightful moorland resort for summer holidays and outings. William Henry knew that something he could do to help give his business a boost was to take exclusive photographs or to do commissioned work. Energetic as ever, he organised himself a new darkroom. It was simply a cupboard beneath the stairs. Instead of speeding his way down to the bottom of the garden, William Henry would let himself down into the dark and eerie space in the hall to develop and print the pictures. It was bitterly cold and cramped down there - but at least the water didn’t freeze as it had in his old studio. William Henry had bought a small candle lantern to light the darkroom. The glass was smoked so the prints weren’t fogged during the process. And Little Helen would spend hours helping her father as he mixed the chemicals and brought the blank paper to life.

William Henry’s old enthusiasm for the art of photography had returned in time for him to record not simply the beautiful countryside, his village and its people, but some very special events. On June 20th, 1897 - just two years after the operation that saved William Henry’s life - Britain and her colonies all had something to celebrate. Queen Victoria had reigned supreme for 60 years. Towns and village sin many parts of the world had prepared to celebrate that day. Huge bonfires were to be lit to blaze all night on high points all over the Empire to honour the Queen. And Great Ayton had one of those high points - Roseberry Topping.

Hot sun must have blazed down on some of the diamond jubilee revellers in different parts of the world. In Ayton, the day dawned drizzly. Unperturbed, the villagers made final preparations for a procession from the Low Green along the banks of the River Leven to the High Green, where a feast would be set. William Henry made his own preparations. He was going to record the whole event with his camera. He and his wife and their two children dressed in their Sunday

best, and set out to join the parade. It was a grand affair. All the villagers were out. Mothers wheeled their babies in prams along the way. Young ladies wore straw boater hats and starched white blouses with full dark skirts. Men marched straight backed along the river bank. William Henry took pictures of everyone.

On the High Green, the feast was laid out in front of the huge Friends' School, whose headmaster was Allie's father, Ralph Dixon. Maids in white mop caps and long aprons served refreshments and everyone ate, drank and was merry. But little Helen Thistlethwaite was not quite as merry as she might have been. For the bonfire on Roseberry Topping was not to be lit until after dark - and Helen was not to be allowed to remain out of bed to see it. Her father had a plan in mind, which would mean his little girl could see the Jubilee fire after all. He had decided to try and photograph it.

Night fell, the young Thistlethwaites were in bed, if not asleep and William Henry was setting up his tripod and pointing the camera lens at the blaze of light on the summit. But he wasn't too sure about the exposure. He had to guess it as the Queen's jubilee celebrations burned to a climax at midnight. But to his own and Helen's delight, the pictures turned out well. William Henry must have been a proud man that day. This was further proof that he was making new strides as a photographer.

He was also making strides in business. In 1900, he took over an aunt's baking and refreshment business and employed as manageress his first cousin Ada Peacock, then a Miss Thrush - and still later a Miss Partridge. These ladies managed the little Ayton tearooms and bakery well, leaving William Henry time to take on yet more. He followed his father into mining.

The quarrying of whinstone on the lower hills around Ayton was the village's staple industry. At one time, as many as three firms employing 20 men and youths worked the mines. William Henry's father, Jeremiah, had bought their Gribdale Gate mines in partnership in 1890. By 1904, William Henry was running the whole thing single-handed. He employed 100 men and even had his own narrow gauge railway line to carry whinstone straight down to Ayton station. William Henry was proving once again his capacity for work in the years after the operation. But it wasn't all toil. He and Allie had loved their honeymoon in the Lake District. Now they found time to return, or to travel further on to Scotland, on annual holidays. William Henry was the organiser, arranging for other relatives and friends to join his family in large houses rented on the lake shores or at the foot of mountains. These holidays were the highlights of the years. The families would walk, cycle, take carriage drives or boat trips to explore the countryside in which they found themselves.

Laughing, the men would exchange hats with the ladies and have their pictures taken beneath flowered bonnets. Or they would take over from their servants for the day and do the washing up outside. No one enjoyed these adventures in Westmorland and Scotland more than Allie. She had grown into a gentle but firm mother, still erect and fashionable and looking younger than her years. At home she was fond of breeding Persian cats and designing and tending the beautiful garden at Harborgill, with her husband. But one of her chief delights was in being out in the countryside.

She had a small dogcart of her own, as was the fashion. And on fine days, she would have the cart hitched to their horse so she could drive little Helen and Bernard out into quiet green lanes around the village. She adored being driven herself - in either car or carriage - on to the wild moors above Guisborough or to the sea. She thought the annual holiday in the country wonderful. What she didn't think quite so wonderful was the fact that her husband was still only a grocer.

Part Seven End of an era when Wm Henry passed on

William Henry didn't just love his wife, he idolised her. He placed her on a pedestal - and she remained there for almost 60 years of their marriage. There was just one cloud on an otherwise sunny horizon. The whinstone mines that William Henry had managed for his father, Jeremiah, at Gribdale Gate were sold in 1912. And handsome and loving as he was, the fact remained that William Henry Thistlethwaite was still the village grocer that Alice Elizabeth Dixon had married.

William Henry had always been a clever man, fond of literature and politics. But he had never been prepared for a career and had simply drifted into the family grocery and drapery business. He had in his youth spent some months as a teacher in Halifax. But this hadn't been a success. He was constantly looking for another, different post. In one of his diaries he wrote: "The boys are very much degenerated … their rudeness and impudence is unbearable. No moral principles."

He had then entered the Liverpool offices of a well-known chartered patent agent, but this lasted only six months. Homesickness was too much for William Henry. But all this wasn't enough for Allie. Her spell as a London governess had taught her how to live like a lady, not like the wife of a grocer in a Yorkshire village such as Great Ayton. Although she was a Quaker, like her husband, she was a most fashionable one and always wore the biggest and best hats. Although she loved her husband dearly, she refused point blank to serve in the Eagle House shop like a common assistant. Her education and upbringing had not fitted her for it. Neither did her pride. Her refusal to help caused family friction, particularly with Jeremiah and his wife, who had built up the business from nothing.

If this troubled Allie, she didn't show it by changing her mind. And through the long, and sometimes difficult, years in the store until 1923 when William Henry retired, she never helped serve there. Instead of chastising his wife, William Henry chastised himself. For Allie's sake, he wished himself a wealthy man, able to give his idol the life she had been used to in London. He worked hard. But in the end, he failed to procure not sufficient money, but sufficient station in life for Allie. William Henry remained dissatisfied with himself for many years. But it didn't prevent him from being a generous man - even lending money to a neighbour who wanted to start his own business - and an affectionate and kindly grey-haired grandfather.

His son Bernard had married and the six children of the marriage soon found what delights were to be had from a visit to see Grandfather Thistlethwaite at Harborgill. Dressed in waistcoat, shirt sleeves and clean white apron, with a pencil behind one ear, he turned parcelling up the groceries into an art form as the children watched open-mouthed. Then there would be visits to the tea rooms - which Willaim Henry proudly advertised s having "most exceptional conveniences for large numbers". He retired at the age of 60, selling the grocery shop premises to the Cockerill family, who still own it. He had also retired as a photographer when the box camera became popular and every Tom, Dick and Harry could take William Henry's precious shots with ease.

On July 26th, 1944 - just months before the war ended - William Henry had a heart attack after sawing logs for the fire. He whispered the pet name he used for his wife all through their years together: "My darling Fay" and he died with her in his arms. Allie was heartbroken without her dear Will. Seven months later, she too died. With them died an era of Quakerism and rigid social manners in Great Ayton. But William Henry has left a legacy of both lives in his diaries he wrote in his youth and in his photographs he took over almost half a century ago. Through them, his granddaughter, Doreen Evered, wants to bring those days back to life in a book that she is writing now. Bernard Thistlethwaite, her father, had a book published called The Thistlethwaite Family when he was only 23, and was made a member of the Royal Historical Society for it.

Passionately interested in the family history herself, Mrs Evered wants to follow in his footsteps. Mrs Evered is a mother of seven. She was born at Harborgill in 1914 after her mother had been rushed from Paris at the outbreak of war. She had been a teacher and is now settling into retirement with the book as her main objective. She has spent weeks in Ayton with William Henry's only daughter, Miss Helen Thistlethwate, now 90 and once a brilliant violinist. She has talked to her aunt about her memories and to other dwellers in the Quaker village that was once known colloquially as "Canny Yatton."

Soon, the pictures and words could be in print. And William Henry, his life and love, and the village that was his home a century ago, will live again - if only in her readers' imaginations.